

Putting the barracks back in the Tower of London

Geoffrey Parnell¹

Among the large body of documents in the National Archives concerning the Office of Ordnance is one drawn up in 1664 that succinctly describes the department's remit. It reads:

'the Office of Ordnance is (according to its instructions) the standing & Grand Magazine of all the necessary habiliments and Instruments of warre (as well by Sea as land) for the defence & safety of the Kingdome & consequently hath influence of the Navies, Forts, Castles, Marching Trains of Artillery & Armies of the Kingdome whether they relate to soveraigne or domestick services.'²

The Office of Ordnance, together with the Office of the Armoury, emerged as offshoots of the Privy Wardrobe at the Tower of London during the early 15th century. These organisations were responsible for procuring and issuing a wide variety of military equipment: the Ordnance, cannon, gunpowder, handguns and the more traditional bow and arrow; the Armoury, armour and edged weapons. During the reign of Henry VIII the size of the Ordnance increased significantly, its independence being enhanced with monies voted direct from Parliament. In 1597 the senior officers of the Ordnance were constituted as a board, a structure that governed the office until it was dissolved by Act of Parliament in 1855 and its responsibilities transferred to the War Office.

Following the Restoration in 1660, the Ordnance enjoyed a period of rapid expansion at the Tower as more and more areas of the fortress were acquired and redeveloped to meet their growing needs. In 1667 the building and maintenance of fortifications and the accommodation of garrisons became more strictly regulated by the Ordnance.³

The impact of the changes at the Tower is evident in the building accounts concerned with the lodging of the garrison. At the time of the

Restoration there is no evidence for any purpose-built lodgings for the garrison, instead soldiers were simply quartered in whatever buildings were available. By 1660 the principal lodgings appears to have been located in Henry VII's 1502 'Long Gallery' situated immediately to the west of the Salt Tower. As part of the notional royal lodgings, the maintenance of this structure was the responsibility of the Office of Works, though other buildings used by the garrison were repaired by the Ordnance. In 1668, this shared responsibility ended when the last entry appears in the Office of Works Bill Books.⁴ Even before the final Works input the Ordnance assumed their new authority and began the process of commissioning what, on paper at least,

was possibly the first purposely designed barracks in England.

The new soldiers' lodging, known as the 'Irish Barracks', adjacent to the New Armouries, but standing in the Outer Ward, was part of a series of extensive investigations authorised by Historic Royal Palaces (the new commercial manager of the Tower) and undertaken by Oxford Archaeology, in the period 1997–2000.⁵ Given the importance of the Tower as one of the country's premier monuments (and a World Heritage Site) what goes on at the fortress is of public interest and importance and should be scrutinised. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the poverty of the historical research associated with the HRP/OA New Armouries report and the misleading

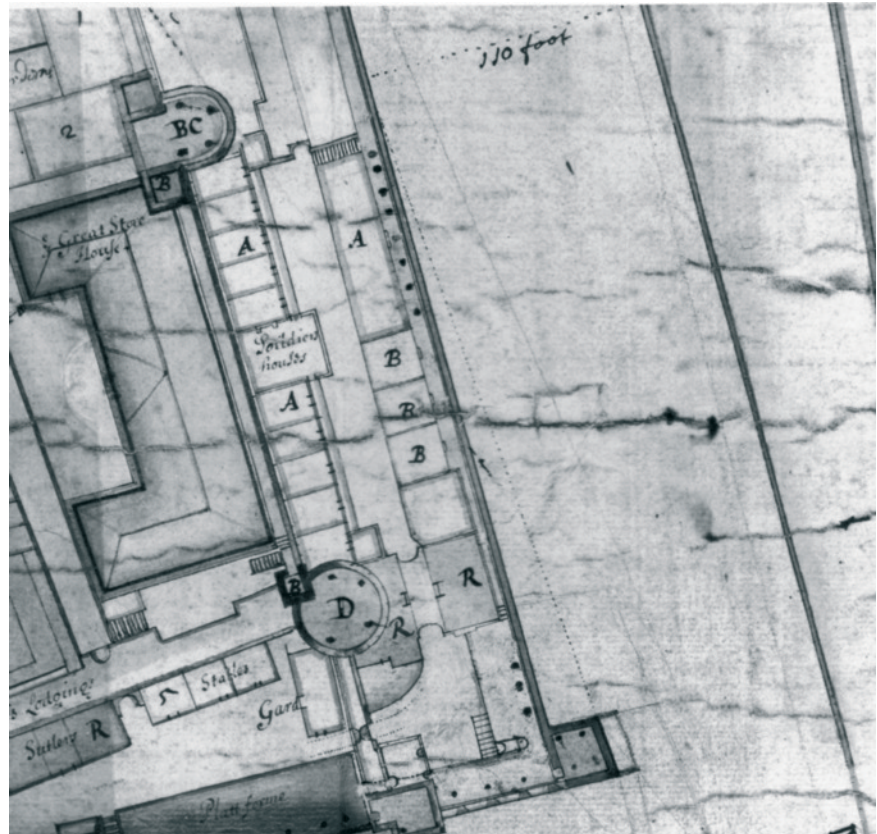


Fig. 1: south-east corner of the Tower from a detailed Ordnance survey drawn in 1682. This is the earliest surviving plan of the Irish Barracks, which is indexed 'A' and shown between the Broad Arrow Tower (BC) and Salt Tower (D) and against the New Armouries storehouse, labelled 'ye Great Store House'. The drawing shows the projecting Middle Room labelled 'Soldiers houses' with the main body of the building divided into five bays either side and projecting square stair turrets at either end. (© Royal Armouries).

conclusions that it has placed on record.

Preparations for the Barracks

As a consequence of recommendations presented to the Privy Council, a royal warrant was issued on 16 April 1667⁶ authorising the building of new accommodation for the Tower garrison and houses for certain displaced Yeoman Warders. The new buildings were to be built in part of the 'Irish Mint' in the outer east ward, described as being from 'the Iron Gate [i.e. Develin Tower] and as farre as the arrow Tower' [Broad Arrow Tower], thus indicating that the site occupied

the southern arm of the ward. Nine days later a detailed design of the proposed soldiers' lodgings was ordered to be brought to the Tower for the Ordnance Commissioners to examine. The rather extraordinary drawing was required to show the site as it existed with the plan of the new building superimposed on it 'in blacke lead' together with a drawn section showing the delineation of the ground level 'by figures att severall stayes' from the White Tower to a new bridge on the wharf. In addition the drawing was to express 'what storyes for the new building what width and what roomes must contained therein.'⁷

Problems and obstructions meant that it was not until 9 January 1669 that preparations for construction were finally put in hand, with £100 being imprested towards the demolition of the old building and the clearance of the site.⁸ Later that month Jonas Moore, the Assistant Surveyor of the Ordnance, reported that the spoil had been removed, and provided some interesting measurements of the quantity involved, figures that seem to reflect the building's footprint:

the length - 110 feet
 the Breadth - 23 feete
 the height - 7 foot ½.

The cubic measurement was 58½ floors, and for this scavelman Edward Sawyer was awarded 6s.06d per floor amounting in total to £19.00.03d.⁹ The length and width of the excavation are very similar to the measurements of the barracks as shown on subsequent surveys (Fig. 1): the depth seems excessive, but the building was positioned hard against the inner curtain wall and this probably involved cutting away the 13th-century berm at the base of the wall to obtain a level surface. On 27 May orders were placed with the Office bricklayer and carpenter to begin construction 'according to the pattern' presented to the Commissioners that day by Jonas Moore, though it is not clear whether this was the same design that was prepared two years earlier.¹⁰

The Barrack Building Accounts

The building seems to have been ready for occupation by the end of the summer of 1670, when a substantial bill was settled with the master carpenter Thomas Casse.¹¹ The master bricklayer, William Fitch, was paid for laying over 31 Rodds of brickwork;¹² although this included four chimneys, most of his work must have been confined to laying the footing of a largely timber building. There are additional payments to the master painter, Thomas Baylie,¹³ for 288 yards of plain painting (probably white), for painting doors and cornices and a 'Small pallizadoe', which refers to a fence erected a short distance in front of the building. The plasterer Bartholomew Clark received nearly £100 for 888 yards of lathing and plastering, 1090 yards of rendering and 1922 yards of whitewashing.¹⁴

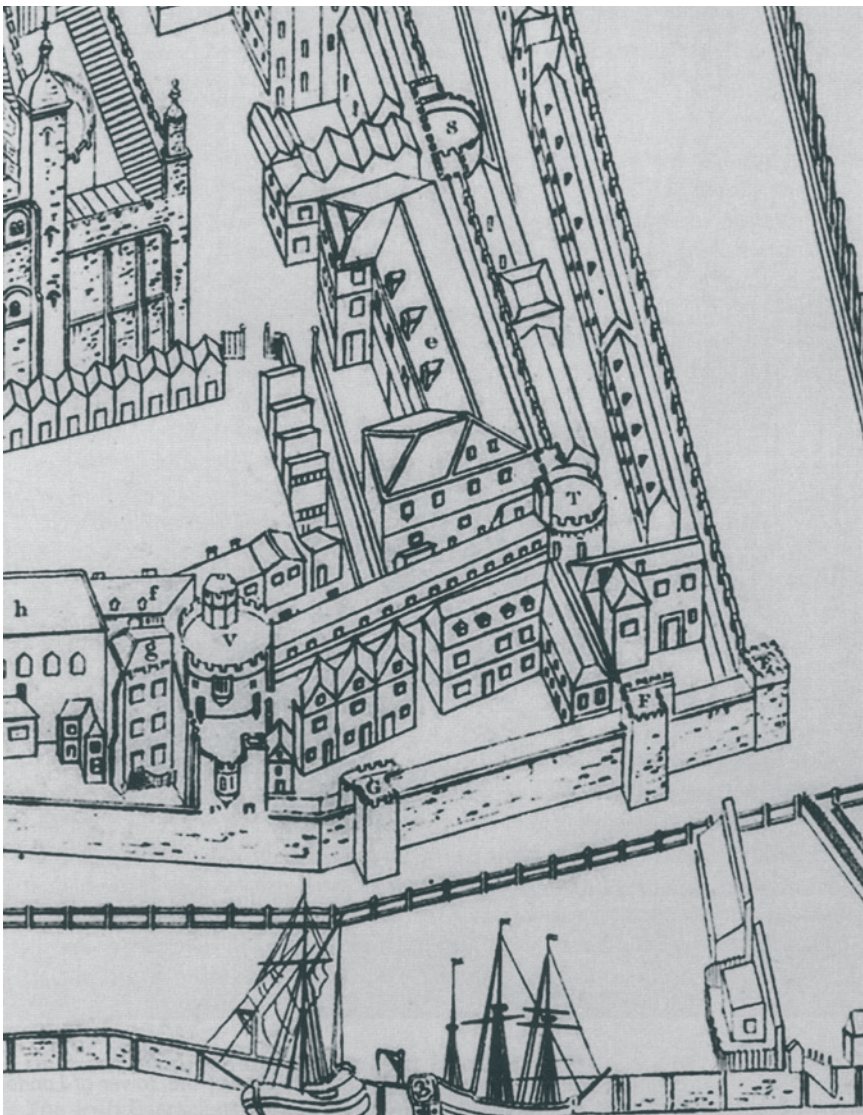


Fig. 2: bird's-eye view of the south-east corner of the Tower, showing the Irish Barracks located behind the New Armouries between the Broad Arrow Tower (marked S) and the Salt Tower (marked T). Although depicted in simple block form, the drawing does emphasise the Middle Room rising above the level of the main roof. The three-dimensional plan of the fortress formed the centre-piece of a set of drawings for which the Ordnance Engineer, Holcroft Blood, received £79.16s.00d in a bill dated 26 June 1688. In the account the drawing is described as a 'Draught of the Tower Rais'd in Perspective upon the Ground Platt'. Together with 'Ornaments' it took some four months to prepare for which Blood received £40. (© The Royal Armouries)

The design and location of the Barracks

In the absence of any proper examination of the building accounts, the authors of the HRP/OA report have relied heavily on a number of historic surveys. Some of these have been misread and wrongly dated. In his Historical Background account Dr. Jeremy Ashbee suggests the 17th-century building remains (Phase 1) that were found during the excavations may not have been part of the post-Restoration Irish Barracks, but 'may have been built during the Commonwealth or conceivably even earlier'¹⁵. This is clearly not the case, as I hope the following details will illustrate.

As the building was essentially of timber construction, the carpenter's bill provides the most detailed information. Thomas Casse received £1059.10.03½d in total. The most expensive item was the boarding of the floors which accounted for £372.03.01d; the rafting of the roof came in at £158.02.01d. Significantly there are payments for a defined part of the building called the 'Middle Roome', and I would suggest that this is the large central bay that breaks forward of the main elevation and rises above the main roof line. All the 17th-century surveys emphasise this feature (Figs. 1 and 2) and given the quality of some of the items included in the fit out, including doors' cases with 'fower lights over them' it may be suggested that part, or all, of the spacious central bay was reserved for officers.

There is a payment for 'fronting [boarding] ye Outside of the Howse'; the quantity is described as being 16 ft 8 ins deep, and probably represents the height of the building to the level of the eaves. This is where a 224 foot long cornice was presumably attached to the elevations of the building – probably a substantial feature for the price was £44.16.00d. There were two floors in the main body of the building and a third under the large roof which was lit with twelve 'Lukeinge'¹⁶ lights sett with Cornish'. Rather surprisingly, the main body of the building appears to have been provided with only six four-light windows. Two 'large paire of stairs' lit by twelve lights were presumably accommodated in the large stair turrets

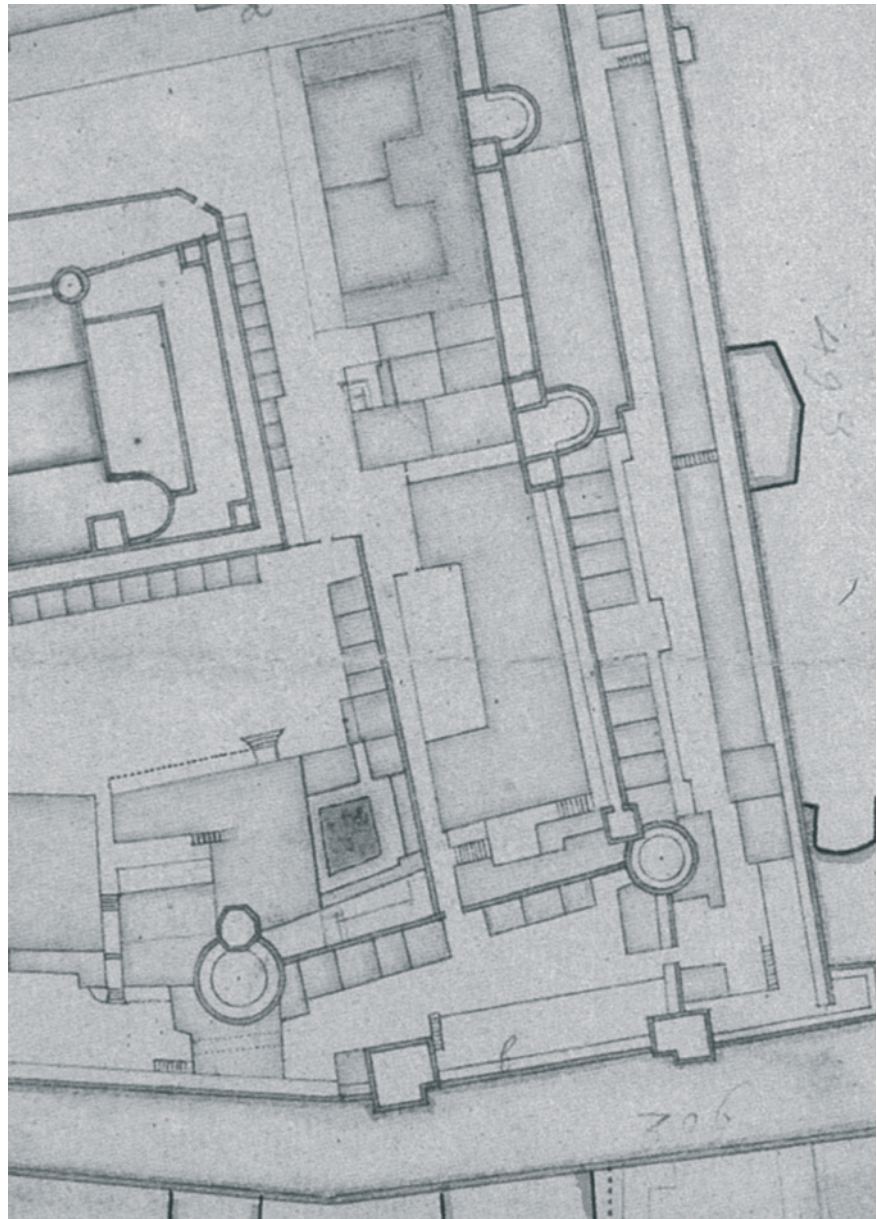


Fig. 3: block plan of the south-east corner of the Tower drawn by the Ordnance Engineer Holcroft Blood in about 1701. Holcroft Blood was the eldest son of Thomas Blood, the man who notoriously attempted to steal some of the Crown Jewels in May 1671. The Jewels were then housed on the ground floor of the Martin Tower. In a bizarre series of events the drawing, together with a detailed floor plan of Jewel Keeper's apartment on the first floor dated 1702, were handed over to the office of the Inspector General of Fortification (Royal Engineers) in 1872 together with a three-page memorandum concerning the attempted theft of some of the Jewels. In the Ordnance 'Registrar of Draughts in the Drawing Room' compiled at the Tower in 1743 the drawing of the Jewel Keeper's apartment is attributed to a Mr Edwards, almost certainly Talbot Edwards, the Keeper of the Jewels who was assaulted by Holcroft Blood's father and who was still living in the Martin Tower when the plan of the apartment was prepared! (© The National Archives).

located at either end of the barracks, and these seems to have connected to a 'Gallery' that would have acted as a communication corridor and is probably the feature depicted on the upper floor of the building in the profile included in a survey of the building carried out in 1752 (Fig. 5).

Lastly, there is an intriguing, and rather expensive, payment of £150 largely concerned with the 'fitting 30 Roomes with bedsteads'. This is

significant, for all the 17th-century surveys, with the exception of the 'Middle Room', show the floor plan of the barracks divided into ten rooms – multiply that by the three floors and you have thirty rooms.

One of the reasons why the authors of the HRP/OA report doubted the connection between excavated 17th-century remains and the Irish Barracks was their misunderstanding about the location of a second barrack block

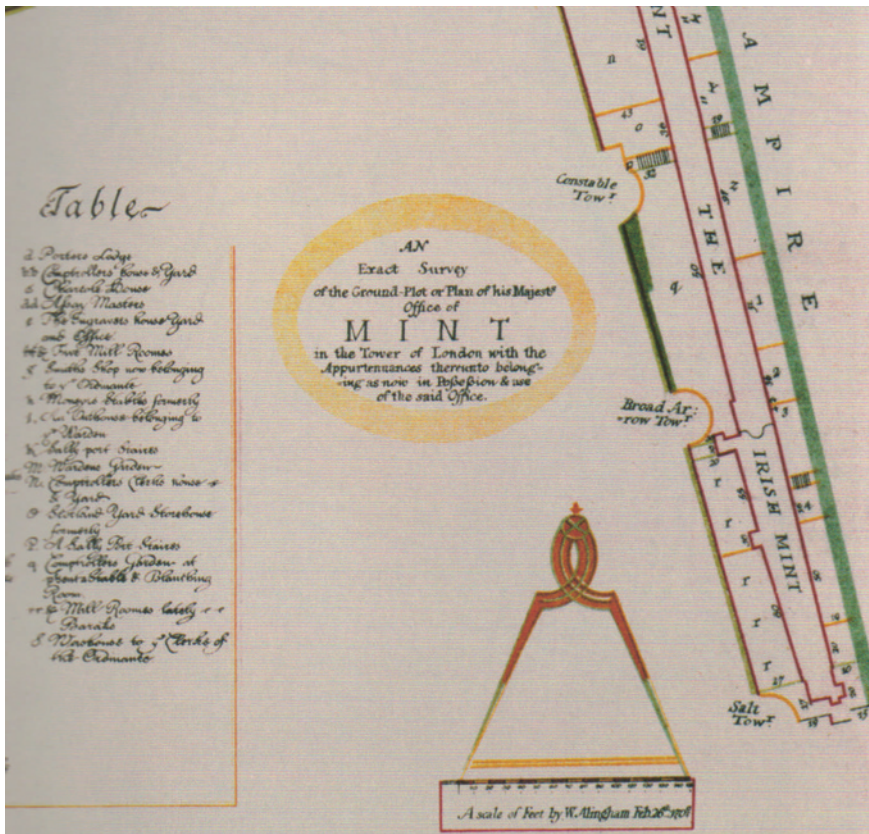


Fig. 4: extract from a ground plan of the holdings of the Mint in the Tower in 1701. The outline of the Irish Barracks can be seen between the Salt and Broad Arrow towers indexed 'r' and described in the table as 'Mill Roomes lately Baraks'. The Mint Comptroller's Garden where the 1688 barracks were constructed immediately to the north between the Broad Arrow and Constable towers and is indexed 'q' in the table. (Courtesy of the Royal Mint)

introduced a few years later. Quoting from the transcript of a report on the defences that I published in the *Antiquaries Journal*,¹⁷ Dr Ashbee draws attention to an extract from the 1682 recommendations:

'The building of a new row of souldiers' houses for 2 Companies and 1/2 against the Old Stone Inner wall of the Tower, in the Garden between the Salt Tower and Constables Tower, as was surveyed heretofore by the Right Honourable Lords of His Majesties Council the Charge amounts to - £900.18.8'.

Dr Ashbee attributes the location to the site between the Salt and Broad Arrow towers, but this is clearly wrong. In fact, the barracks were constructed in the 'Garden' of the Comptroller of the Mint, lying to the north and occupying the space between the Broad Arrow and Constable towers. On 9 July 1685 the Ordnance Board ordered a contract to be drawn up 'with all possible speede for ye building ye Barracks in ye Comptrollers Garden in ye Mint'.¹⁸ In March 1688 the principal bills for the new Barracks were settled with Thomas

Downes and Robert Fitch, bricklayers, and Thomas Moore, carpenter: their combined bills came in at just under £640, thus making a considerable saving on the £900 estimate; that may be partly due to the fact that the building used the inner curtain wall as its rear elevation. The building was a two-storied brick structure with, like the earlier Irish Barracks, an additional floor contrived under the roof lit with eight 'Lucerne Windows'. The roof seems to have been altered during construction for the carpenter was paid extra for 'Cutting off the Topps of the Raftering & altering the Roofe to Flatt for the Lead'.

The new building can be seen on numerous drawings dating from the end of the 17th century (Fig. 3) and its predecessor in a rare photograph of 1861 (Fig. 6). This detail seems to have been missed by the authors of the New Armouries report, who even reproduced some of the relevant drawings. That said, even a cursory inspection of the Bill Books recording the regular maintenance of Ordnance buildings would have indicated where the 1670 Irish Barracks stood:

'16 April 1674. Ordered. That an order be sent forthwith to ye Carpenter to lyne all ye Walls of ye soldiers Lodgeings in ye Tower, next ye great New Storehouse [the New Armouries], ye Dampness whereof is a great prejudice to ye health of ye said Soldiers for want of Lyneing ye said Walls with good deals'.¹⁹

On 3 March 1695 the Ordnance Board instructed their Clerk of Check, Matthew Blyton to

'take care the old Irish Mint, and the Barracks over against the same soe far as relates to this Office, being to be delivered to the Offices of the Mint, who are to make use of them during the recoining of the Clipt money of this kingdom, pursuant to his Majt's Warrant dated the 21st February yesterday received.'

The Irish Barracks, so it seems, had found a new life. Although this arrangement was intended as a temporary measure the Mint seems to have been in no hurry to return the building. After repeated attempts at recovery an exasperated Board of Ordnance appealed to their Master-General, the Duke of Marlborough, by way of a memorial dated 11 October 1715:

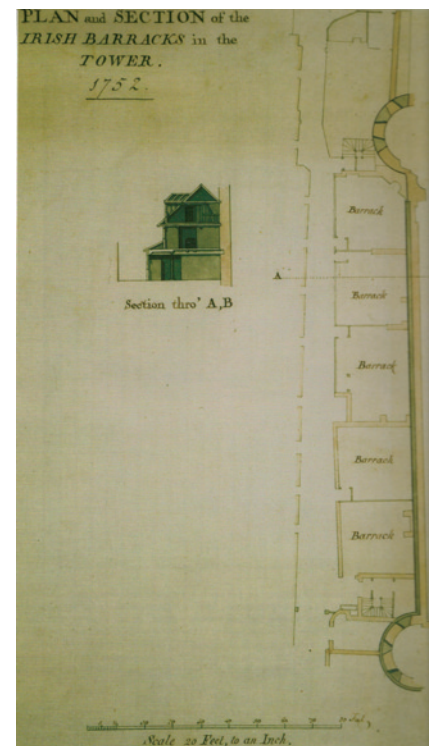


Fig. 5: plan and section of the Irish Barracks drawn by the Ordnance engineer, Dugal Cambell, in 1752. (note that north is to the bottom) © British Library)

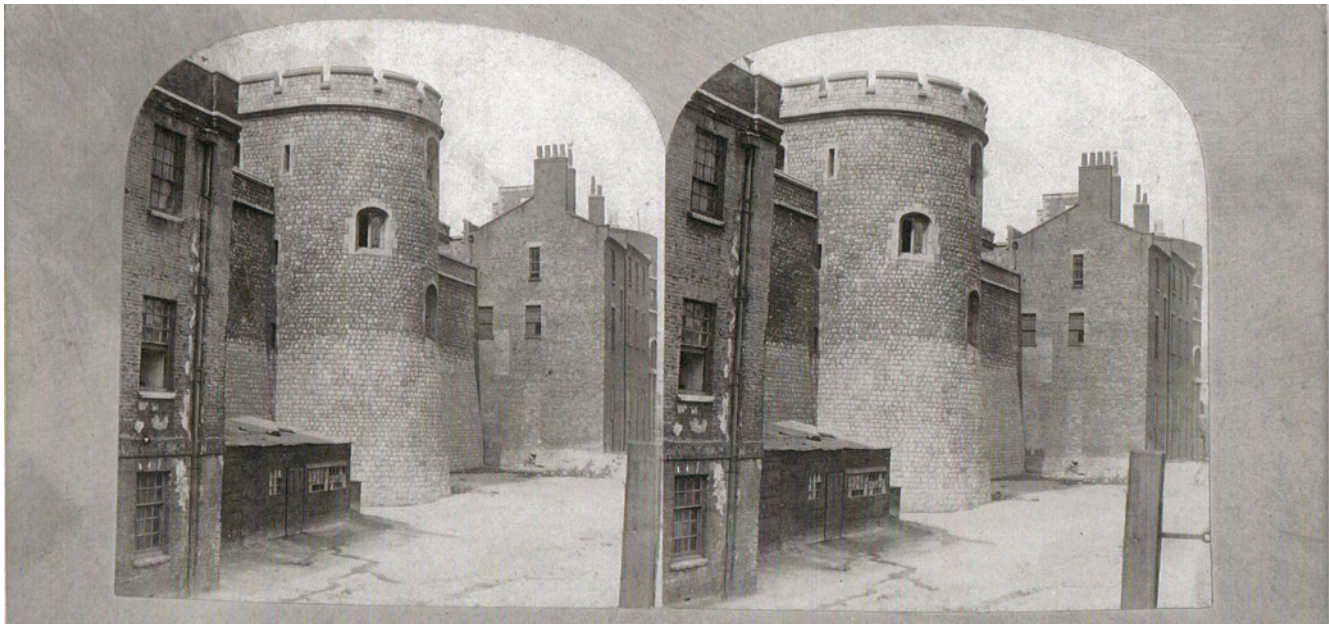


Fig. 6: the northern limit of the Napoleonic 1805 extension to the Irish Barracks is captured on the left hand side of the images in this stereograph (No. 182) released by Henry Dages and Alfred Harman in 1861. The structure between the barracks and the Constable Tower is a shed. (© Author)

‘to acq^t him therewith, & y^t there’s a Building w^{ch} was lent to the Mint Office in 1695 by Warr^t from his then Maj^{ty} to be used during the Coinage w^{ch} they refuse to restore Desiring his Grace to move his Maj^{ty} to give Orders for restoring the same Buildings w^{ch} the Mint have no Occasion for, and also the adjoining Stables w^{ch} they made no use of to be Converted into Barracks without w^{ch} it will be impossible to make room for the Number.’²⁰

On 1 November 1715 a further appeal to the Duke finally brought restoration, but notes that the Mint had reduced the building to a ‘ruinous Condition’.²¹

The barrack building returned to the Ordnance in 1715 was not the one that they had parted company with twenty years earlier. An outline survey of the property of the Mint carried out in 1701 (Fig. 4) and Dugal Campbell’s survey of 1752 indicated significant modifications, particularly to the ground floor. The ground floor has been extended by means of a pentice, carrying a pitched roof, out towards Mint Street and on a line consistent with that of the ‘Middle Room’. The two stair turrets survive at the extremities of the building while the upper floors look unaltered. The new arrangement is clearly seen on Campbell’s profile of the building (Fig. 5) and behind the line of the former frontage is a large post supporting the floor above. This is one

of many in the building and probably relates to the comments in a report attached to the survey in which Campbell describes the block as:

‘an old Building Framed with Timber and weather-Boarded on the front. All the principal Timbers are much decayed the Roof is very defective & lets in water. The whole Building is out of level and stands at present by the upright posts which are put in to sustain it’.

There can be little doubt that the decline of the building had something to do with the tenant behaviour of the Royal Mint. It is very unlikely that their operations could have been accommodated in the existing rooms of the Irish Barracks. On the 1701 survey the building is labelled ‘Mill Roomes lately Barracks’ and it should be noted that the replacement Milling Rooms located immediately west of Brass Mount, comprised large open rooms housing giant presses. That said, I strongly suspect that the ground floor of the barracks was stripped of its partition walls and extended to create larger and more usable working areas.

Dr. Ashbee, apparently unaware of the nature of the Mint’s involvement, makes much of the 1701 survey, which is principally concerned with the delineation of Mint property, and claims that it is evidence for a totally different building on the site.²² He then proceeds to outline the subsequent history of the site. He shows a survey he

dates to the 1680s,²³ but it quite clearly incorporates the large houses of the Surveyor and Clerk of the Ordnance (on the site of the present Fusiliers Building), which were constructed in 1699–1701. To support his date we are informed that the Grand Storehouse was constructed in 1687–88, whereas the contract to clear the site and dig the foundations was not, in fact, signed until 29 March 1688 and the building was finished in 1692.²⁴ Also, part of the argument in the plan dated ‘1717’ by the author²⁵ curiously shows the offices of the Board of Ordnance and the adjoining Coldharbour storehouse to the west, both structures only completed in 1792! I could continue, but I think that would be unfair.

In conclusion, it can be said that the concept of the Irish Barracks in 1667 narrowly predates the buildings that the eminent Ordnance engineer Sir Bernard de Gomme designed in the late 1660s for military sites at Plymouth, Portsmouth and Tilbury Fort in Essex. These were simple, rectangular, brick-built, blocks, beneath M-shaped roofs. Each room was provided with a partitioned privy, stairs and back-to-back fireplaces.²⁶ Set against regular layouts and arguably better constructions, the Tower lodgings appear less sophisticated with only communal access and fewer facilities. However, much was determined by the physical constraints of building anything in the Tower of London. A

narrow strip of ground surrounded by high walls and with Royal Mint carts rumbling by at all hours of the day is

1. Dr. Geoffrey Parnell is a former Keeper of Tower History at the Royal Armouries, Tower of London, and a former English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monument. He has undertaken numerous excavations at the Tower and has written widely on the archaeology of the site, and its buildings and institutions. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

2. SP 29/67, f. 176.

3. The key reforms relate to a royal warrant issued on 27 March 1667 empowering the Master-General Commissioners to direct the building of the Portsmouth and Plymouth defences (WO 55/332, 134–5), and another dated 26 April 1667 which made them accountable for any repairs that had been made to fortifications since the Restoration (*ibid.*, pp. 157–8 & PC 6/18, p. 109).

4. WORKS 5/11, 'Bricklayers employed ... in the soldiers quarters where was formerly the kings lodings'.

5. G. Keevill and S. Kelly *The Tower of London New*

perhaps not ideal. That said, the Irish Barracks had one thing in its favour, for it appears to be the first occasion when

Armouries Project Oxford Archaeology Occasional Paper 12 (2006).

6. WO55/332, 141.

7. WO49/112, entry April 25th 1667.

8. WO47/A, f. 70.

9. See WO51/18, f. 98, for delayed payment dated 22 Nov. 1675. A floor equals 18' sq and 1' deep.

10. WO47/19A, ff. 167, 170 and painter f. 171.

11. WO51/12, ff. 96 and 97.

12. WO51/10, f. 117. See also WO51/12, f. 46. for laths used to batten the roof.

13. *Ibid.*, f. 51.

14. *Ibid.*, f. 62.

15. *Op cit* fn 5, 20.

16. Meaning 'Lucarne', a window projecting from a sloping roof, i.e. a dormer window.

17. G. Parnell 'The Refortification of the Tower of London, 1679-86' *Antiq J* 63 (1983) 337–352.

18. WO47/15, f. 88.

the word 'barracks' appears in the written English language.²⁷ To be continued ...

19. WO47/19B, f. 45.

20. WO47/28, f. 228. Marlborough asked for the return of the barracks as early as 14 March 1704, see WO46/6, 2. A request to the Treasury for the return of the building on 15 April 1713 states that it was needed for the 'reception of the third Regt. of Foot Guards'. See WO55/404, 60.

21. WO55/405, 15.

22. *Op cit* fn 5, 20.

23. *Op cit* fn 5, 19, Fig. 11.

24. G. Parnell 'The Small Armoury at the Tower of London' *Apollo* (February 1993) 82–85.

25. *Op cit* fn 5, 22.

26. A. Saunders *Fortress Builder* (2004) especially 256–261.

27. J. Douet *British Barracks 1600-1914* (1998) 8.

Abbreviations

PC	Privy Council, The National Archives
SP	State Papers, The National Archives
WORKS	Office of Works, The National Archives
WO	War Office, The National Archives

Letters

The Cowley Hole

I read the article on the Cowley Hole with great interest, as there is a similar structure in our garden. There are also similar structures found in the district around here.

Our hole, well, or whatever, appears to conform to the same building type: in size, position slightly below the ground, its domed top with wide circular opening, and a badly fitting stone cover. It is also mainly constructed of brick, both sides and bottom, and is about 7 to 12 ft deep.

Our house was built in 1903 on what had been an open field named Heathfield, and is brick-built; it was built as the residence of the owner and manager of a brick field in Shiplake. We moved from London in 1971, and the well at that time had above it a pump with pipe running down into the well, we assumed at first that it was a well (see figure).

However, on later examination we found that whatever water was in it came from the sink alongside the boiler in the washroom in an outhouse, that had a grate for a fire beneath the boiler. Water to and from the boiler had to be brought in by buckets, placed in the sink beneath the single cold tap. The idea was to separate the washing water with its soap and washing soda from the ordinary waste which would go into the

cesspit, which had an anaerobic chamber. The washing water went from the sink by underground pipe into the top of the well; it was clearly intended for re-use, either for washing down exterior premises or objects, or for use on the garden. It was most definitely not a cesspit, one of which lies further down the garden, which incidentally is on sloping ground.

The well or water storage place was clearly built at the same time as the house and outbuildings. At that time the only washing powders would have been soap-based, or possibly washing soda. Since the pit was lined with brick, it probably did not retain water for very long, only sufficiently long for its re-use.

I have seen similar pits or wells in some of the farm houses near here, and probably they were for a time widespread. Ours is still there, but we filled it in when grandchildren began to be inquisitive; the pump meanwhile had decayed and collapsed.

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Crystal Palace Low Level Station

I enjoyed the article by David Sorapure and Michael Tetreau on Crystal Palace station, but feel that a small correction is in order. It is stated that the present (1877) station building was designed by



Pump over well in garden of Heathfield, 1996

one 'Jacob Hood' (p. 307) and, later, by Frederick Dale Bannister and Whitney Mannering (p. 308).

The Institute of Civil Engineers' *Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers Volume 2: 1830–1890* records that Robert Jacomb-Hood [1822–1900] was Resident Engineer for the London Brighton & South Coast Railway from 1846 to 1860, and had responsibility for the work at Crystal Palace in 1853–54. Frederick Dale Bannister succeeded him and was concerned with the station as rebuilt in 1877.

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