

# Old Hospital Block Lamp Post Repair, HM Tower of London

*An Archaeological Watching Brief*

**Code: ToL 155**



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## **1 Location and Scope of work**

- 1.1 The lamp post located on the south-western corner of the Old Hospital Block had suffered some damage due to being struck by a moving vehicle. In order to verify the extent of the damage and determine whether the lamp post needed removing for repair, it was necessary to excavate a trench around the base to a depth of no more than 1 m.
- 1.2 Although the excavated area would have been heavily disturbed by the installation of the lamp itself and the surrounding services and drainage structures, there was nevertheless significant archaeological potential. Therefore, the work was not extended beyond the base and a suitably qualified archaeologist was present throughout the entire excavation process.
- 1.3 The Tower of London is a designated Scheduled Ancient Monument and a World Heritage Site. Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), as custodian of the Tower, seek the agreement of Historic England regarding any repairs, improvement or alteration that may impact upon the historic fabric or the archaeology. This work is permissible under the Standing Clearance guidelines, which Historic England has approved due to the lamp post's existence and the likely disturbance to the site already caused by its erection. However, as a commitment of HRP's Conservation Principles, and due to the archaeological importance of the area, HRP Curators have asked that an archaeologist be in attendance to undertake a watching brief on the work.

## **2 Archaeological Background**

### **2.1 The Tower of London**

The building of the Tower of London was begun shortly after William the Conqueror's Conquest, whose great keep, the 'White Tower', sits at its heart. The fortress was first constructed within the south eastern corner of the ancient Roman city walls, along the riverbank of the Thames. Extended beyond the boundaries of the Roman city walls by Henry III, and developed as a concentric castle by Edward I in the 13th century, the Tower – the monarch's stronghold amidst an often hostile city – became the home of major State Institutions such as the Royal Mint, as well as the setting for nationally significant historical events. The Tower is the home of the Coronation Regalia and Crown Jewels, and the Royal Armouries Museum, which still displays part of its collection within the White Tower. The fortress is most strongly associated in the popular imagination with the Tudors, and the turbulent events of the 16th century, particularly with the many prisoners kept within its walls. The 19th century Romantic perception of the Tower, and the castle's emerging identity as a tourist attraction, led to the demolition of many institutional structures and the addition of new 'medieval' style neo-gothic buildings.

### **2.2 The history of the site**

Outside the original eastern defences of the Tower of London, the site was incorporated into the fortress during the construction of the eastern inner curtain wall in the 1230s. It is not clear if any structures were built on this site prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

By the 1530s, the site was occupied by a timber-framed range constructed between the Wardrobe and Broad Arrow towers measuring 31 m x 7 m (Parnell, 1993, 56) and shown on the Haiward and Gascoyne map of 1597 (Figure 4).



This was probably the '*new frame nowe made a wardrobe for the kyng in 1532*' (Keay, 2001, 42). From the 1597 plan, it appears to have been a brick-built building with a tiled roof, furnished with three chimneys (Fig. 4).

It is not clear when this wardrobe-related building was demolished, however, by 1681-82 it had been removed and the site was occupied by a residential building (Impey & Parnell, 2000, 75). Little is known of these buildings, but as officers' accommodation they were presumably high-status dwellings (Fig. 4).

It was this 17<sup>th</sup>-century dwelling that was removed to allow the construction of the Old Hospital Block in 1718-1719, which was originally used as accommodation for the Ordnance clerks. It was later converted into accommodation for victims of the Crimean War before later being used to house German prisoners of war and surrounded by barbed wire. The northern half of the building was bombed in 1940 and was subsequently demolished and reconstructed in the 1950's due to being structurally unsound.

It is unclear when the two lamp posts located either end of the hospital block were erected, but their style would tend suggest that they are Victorian in date.

### **3 Aims and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Aims**

The lamp situated on the south western corner of the Old Hospital block required repairs that involved an excavation 1 m deep dug to the base of the lamp-post foundations. For health and safety reasons the lamp post was supported by a crane on a hiab lorry while the ground was excavated beneath it. The main priority of the excavation was to firstly establish the extent, if any, of the damage to the lamp post and whether it would be necessary to remove it for repair.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

The excavation was carried out by HRP's ground-work contractors. Despite the high probability of the area having been disturbed when the lamp post was inserted, there was still the potential for observing surviving features of earlier domestic buildings as well uncovering un-stratified finds from various periods during the course of the excavations. The excavation was thus carefully monitored by a qualified archaeologist. The works were paused upon encountering anything of potential archaeological significance to enable investigatory work and/or recording, or to take on the task of hand excavation if this was deemed appropriate.

The archaeologist in attendance worked in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* and all relevant *Standard and Guidance* documents.

### **4 Description of Findings**

#### **4.1 Summary**

The first day of excavation on Wednesday 9 March 2016 entailed opening up an exploratory hole measuring 0.5 m x 0.40 m to a depth of 0.9 m where the cast-iron flange of the lamp-post was uncovered. It was immediately clear that the post was free-standing



and held in place by the soil and structures around it. In order to see if there were any fractures in the metal work a larger excavation space was needed. Work resumed on Monday 14 March 2016 and a trench measuring 1.65 m x 1.40 m was opened up around the lamp-post to a depth of 0.9 m (See figure 5).

#### 4.2 Description

No archaeological features were observed in this trench due to the presence of a number of services, including a water mains pipe measuring 0.18 m in diameter at 9.01 m OD, a gas pipe measuring 0.09 m in diameter at 8.81 m OD and a probably foul drain pipe was apparent in the western section (see figure 6). The installation of these modern structures together with the installation of a drain to the east would probably have truncated any evidence of archaeological or architectural elements.

The only feature present was the existence of one brick measuring 0.1 m x 0.07 m x 0.23 m and a small limestone slab 0.19 m long and 0.03 m thick that seem to have been used as a wedge against the gas pipe on the northern end of the trench at 8.87 m OD (See figure 7).

The base of the lamp beneath the ground level measures 0.86 m with a diameter of 0.25 m. It sits on a flange base with a diameter of 0.55 m which is unsupported. The whole structure is apparently held in place by the earth and the paving slabs surrounding it. The trench itself has been backfilled by a sticky gravelly and slightly waterlogged silty sand material observed to a depth of around 0.75 m. It contained a number of residual finds including a fairly large quantity of bricks and mortar, which appear to be around 17<sup>th</sup> century in date, measuring 0.1 m x 0.07 m x 0.23 m, as well fragments of slate and one sherd of green-glaze pottery.

### 5 Synthesis

The location of the lamp-posts at the north-western and south-western corners of the Old Hospital Block frame the building and seem to date at least to the Victoria era based on their form and style. They certainly already existed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as they are clearly visible in photographs taken in 1909 (See figure 2). Despite the northern half of the terrace being bombed in 1940 the post-bomb photos show that both lamp-posts were still standing unscathed (See Fig. 3).

The excavation zone was concerned with the lamp-post on the south western corner of the Old Hospital block and was situated in an area that had been heavily disturbed by the installation of the lamp-post itself but also by several services and a contemporary drain. Despite reaching a considerable depth of 0.9 m, no archaeological features were present. However, the presence of building material, which were spot-dated to around the 17<sup>th</sup> century indicates that the demolition material from the 17<sup>th</sup> century residential building was used as part of the backfill for the lamp installation.

#### Archive, artefacts and ecofacts

The archive consists of administrative documents, photographic register and digital photographs as well as a collection of finds including two bags of CBM, a nail and one sherd of pottery. No sedimentary samples were taken.







Figure 2: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England - "Roman city wall and remains of Wardrobe east of Tower Keep" (1909)



Figure 3: "Old Hospital Block - Elevation of damaged north end before demolition commenced" - A.742/2, 1950









Figure 5: View of excavated area looking towards the west



Figure 6: View showing the base of the lamp post and the services.





Figure 7: The wedge-like feature against the gas pipe

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