

Observations on Tower Green

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THE HISTORY OF TOWER GREEN, with the exception of a small plot of paved granite to the south of the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula where (on very rare occasions) the scaffold for private execution was erected, has received meagre attention from the many writers associated with the Royal Fortress. This is perhaps understandable, since the whole area has been vacant ground for the last three hundred years, and little documentary research concerning its earlier history has been published.

In June 1975, a series of trenches were excavated across Tower Green to accommodate fuel pipes for a new heating system. From a point north-west of the Bloody Tower, the operation advanced indirectly northwards, to the area immediately south of the Chapel. From here work extended eastwards, on to the Parade Ground south of the Waterloo Barracks (see Fig. 2). Altogether some 320 feet (c. 97.5m) of trench, 2ft 6in wide and 3ft 0in deep, was excavated.

The possibility of any archaeological deposits being disturbed by the trenching operation was considered unlikely; at such a shallow depth it was thought that only modern make-up levels would be encountered. However, shortly after work began a number of walls were met and the present author was asked to initiate a programme of recording.

Examination of the various features was limited by the narrow confines of the trench. This situation was frustrated by an absence of secure dating material—invariably because the depth of excavation did not extend below the tops of the features. Furthermore, there was an over-riding and unavoidable need to complete the task of recording in the shortest time possible.

Information extracted from narrow trenches has obvious limitations. However, with the aid of documentary evidence from the extensive accounts of the Board of Ordnance at the Public Record Office, it has been possible to identify, and to some degree date, many of the features recorded. In addition, some unexpected information was obtained from a seventeenth-century plan.

Almost all the features are sixteenth century and can be arranged into two groups: those belonging to two walled gardens which encompassed a large part of Tower Green, and a building sited east of the Beauchamp Tower which, at least towards the end of its life, functioned as the Tower's Main Guard.

For brevity, description and interpretation of the excavated remains are included with the documentary evidence; all locations referred to in the text are found in Fig. 2.

Tower Green occupies the south-west corner of the Inner Ward. The area was incorporated into the precincts of the Tower during the final years of the twelfth century by Richard I's chancellor, William Longchamp. Longchamp expanded the eleventh-century limits of the fortress (which ran north from the Wakefield Tower) westwards, to include all the

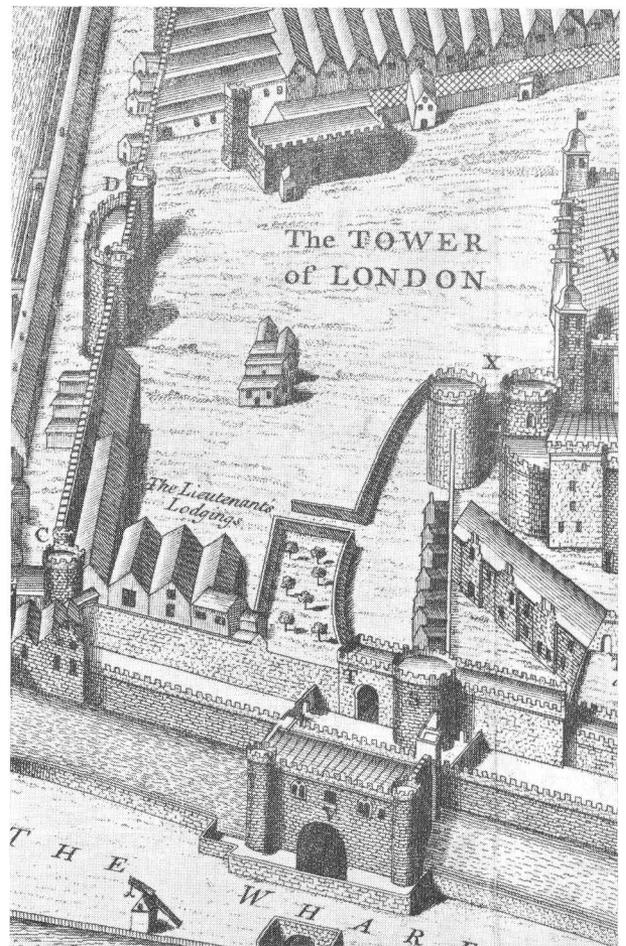


Fig. 1: Part of the Haiward and Gascoyne survey of 1597.

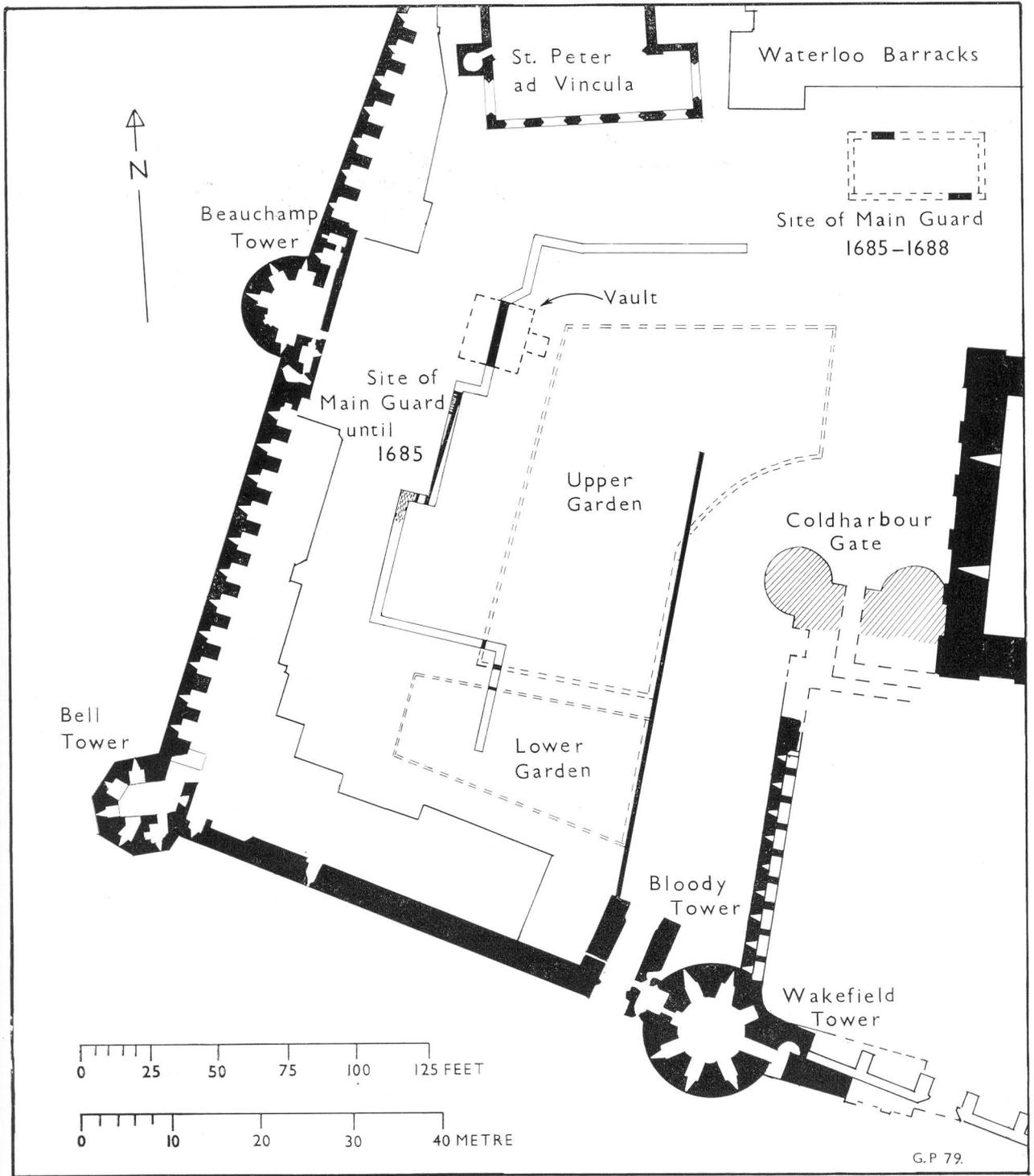


Fig. 2: Tower of London: location of trenches and their environs.

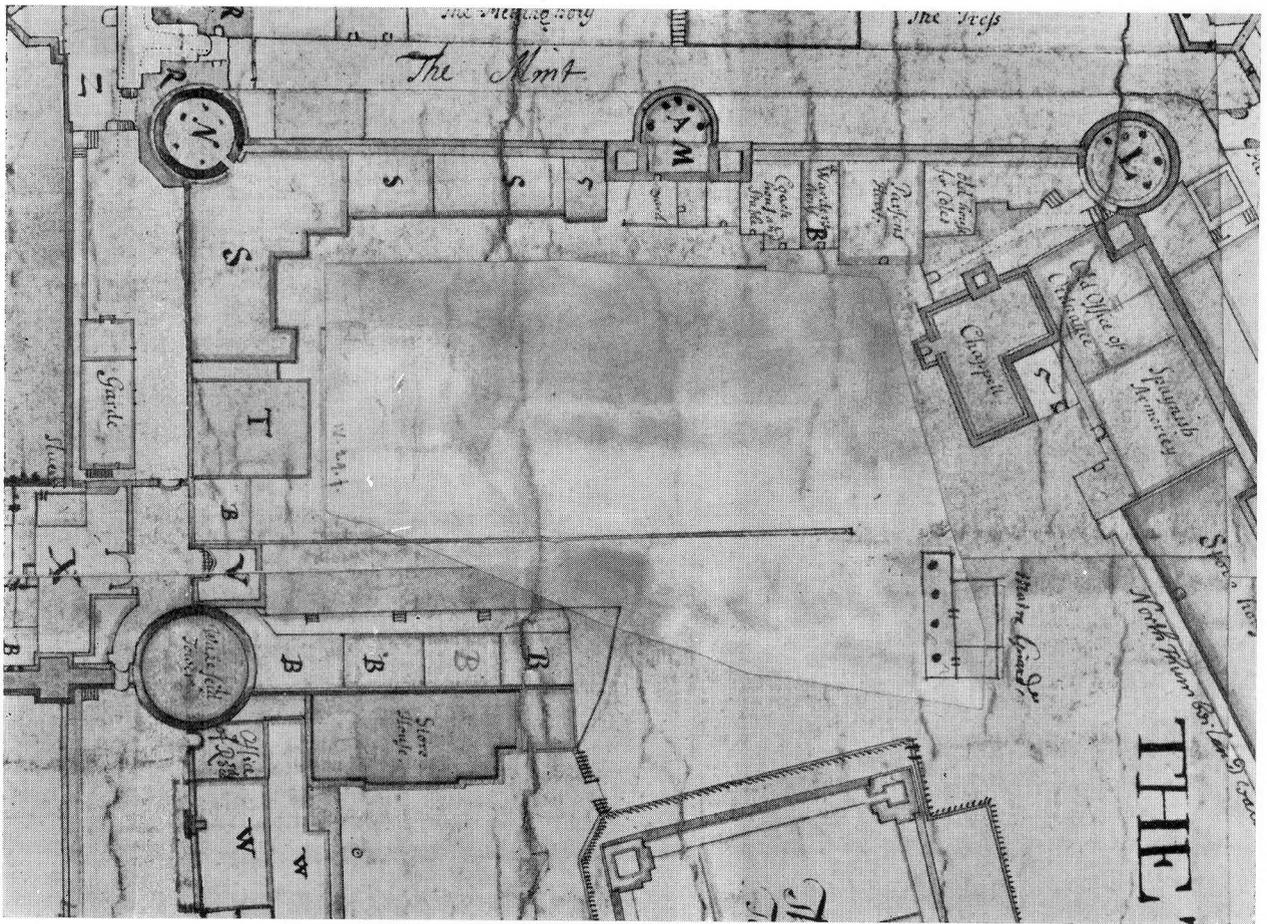


Fig. 3: Part of plan dated *circa* 1680, showing patch over Tower Green with site of new Maine Guard to the east of the Chapel.

area of the Inner Ward south of the Beauchamp Tower¹.

In *circa* 1220, Henry III embarked upon the first of his lavish building programmes which ultimately were to transform the Tower into a great concentric fortress. Work involved the construction of the Wakefield Tower with an integral water-gate to the east²—the latter occupying the extreme south-east corner of Longchamp's ward. This water-gate—later converted into a stout gate house and known universally as the Bloody Tower, was the principal river entrance into the Tower. Incoming traffic would have passed through the gate and on some 175 feet (c.53.50m) further to the Coldharbour Gate, the main entry into the Inmost Ward. The gradient of the road leading north from the Bloody Tower must have been a little steeper than the present one—the original surface within the gate being 2 feet (0.6m) lower than

it is now. Some form of retaining wall down the east side of the road must have been a necessity, as the road was cut *circa* 6 feet (1.83m) into the general slope of the hill. On the 1597 plan (see Fig. 1) the wall can be seen running north from the Bloody Tower, its line veering towards the White Tower where the road diverges eastwards into the Coldharbour Gate. The opening in the retaining wall north of the Bloody Tower, and the walls of the passage which ran westwards from it may also be regarded as medieval in origin. Although not shown on the plan, it can be supposed that the passage contained a flight of steps at the eastern end. These are first specifically referred to in the seventeenth century, but presumably date from the medieval period, since access to the south-west corner of the Inner Ward at this point avoids a lengthy detour to the north.

1 R. A. Brown, "The Tower of London: its Buildings and Institutions" (1978) 27-28.

2 P. E. Curnow, *op cit.*, 55-61.

3 L. E. Tanner & W. Wright, "Recent Investigations re-

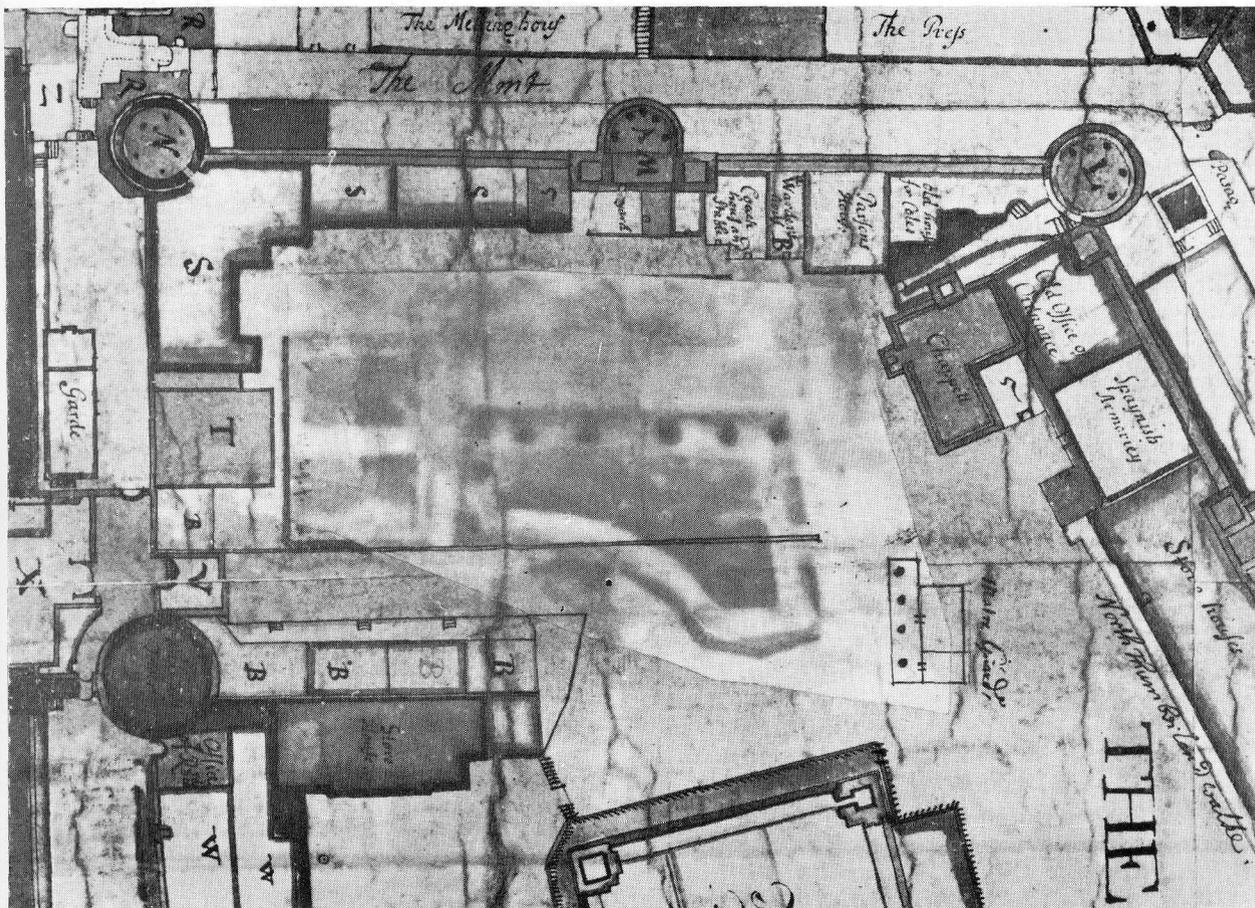


Fig. 4: *op. cit.*, photographed under ultra violet, showing Upper and Lower Gardens; edge of the old Maine Guard can just be seen east of the Beauchamp Tower marked A & M.

By 1597 the area south of the passage had been made into a garden by the addition of a north-south wall further to the west. Exactly when this occurred is difficult to say, but presumably no later than 1483 when the "Little Princes" were seen "shooting and playing in the Garden" close to where tradition records their murder³. It is worth noting that the garden played host to one of the Tower's most celebrated prisoners—the ill-fated Sir Walter Raleigh. Whilst lodged in the Bloody Tower during the early years of the seventeenth century, Raleigh was allowed to exercise in part of the garden, which by this time formed part of the personal domain of the Lieutenant of the Tower⁴.

In 1975, two short sections of the passage walls were examined. They were space 8 feet (2.44m) apart and comprised two identical phases of construction. The earliest, of medieval or Tudor date, incorporated

re-used pieces of Reigate sandstone. This had largely been dismantled and replaced by brickwork of probable early seventeenth-century date—the north wall being thickened at the same time. Contemporary with this work was the formation of a second, or upper garden, to the north of the passage. This had been achieved by attaching a north-south wall to the west end of the passage.

During the later part of the seventeenth century, the history of Tower Green can be inferred from documentary evidence. Of particular interest is a Royal Warrant dated 13th July 1682⁵, which authorised implementation of a number of "Articles" made in a report of the previous year. A transcript of the report has been entered in the warrant book—an admirable act since the original report does not seem to have survived. The report was prepared by a committee of Peers who had been appointed by Charles

garding the fate of the Princes in the Tower", *Archaeologia* (1933) 84, 14.

4 H. M. Colvin (ed) "The History of the Kings Works" Vol. III (1975) 264.

5 WO55 396, pp.76-83.

II, (in Council at Whitehall) to "inspect and examine the present state and condition of the Tower of London" and determine "what repairs and other works are most necessary to be forthwith done." The report was read before the Council on 8th February 1681. It contained 32 articles, some of which derived from an earlier report made by the "Earle of Sunderland, Earle of Essex and Lord Viscount Hide" on 1st December 1679. Of the entries three are of direct interest:—

- 22 The pulling down of the 2 Warders houses over against the Lieutenant of the Tower's Stables and all the Brickwall round the Bowling Green and Garden so farr as the said Lieutenants house to bring it all upon a Levell for a large Parade place and to bring the Brickwall in once place in a straight line towards the Main Guard from the Bloody Tower to the Hill with the clearing the Earth away and paving the whole ground for the Parade place—£426.8.10.
- 23 To repair the Stone Platform before the Maine Guard when the new one is built—£9.15.0.
- 24 ffor building of a new Maine Guard upon the Hill where the Old one is at present of 47 feet 2 inch long and 19 feet 7 inch broad, a brick-wall round and the Old Roof to be sett upon the new Guardhouse with the taking down of the Old Wall will cost—£120.4.8.

The report was accompanied by a drawing which included a peculiar plan of the Tower in the frustrating birds eye view tradition. The drawing has been engraved for the Society of Antiquaries and published in the fourth volume of "Vetusta Monumenta"⁶. The Society do not appear to have been acquainted with the report and the plan carries the date 1681-1689. This can be narrowed down to 1681, but it is worth mentioning that as an accurate topographical record of the Tower for this date, the plan is misleading, since the drawing provided an impression of how the fortress would appear after reparations had been carried out, and it will be demonstrated that some of these had to wait a number of years.

A second, and more informative plan, associated with the report is housed in the Tower's New Armouries Library. The plan forms part of the Dartmouth collection; the first Lord Dartmouth (formerly George Legge) was Master General of the Ordnance during compilation of the report. It is not dated, but must have been drawn *circa* 1680; it is certainly older than the birds eye view, if only marginally. Apparently used as a working drawing during the draughting of the report, a number of patches

have been applied to areas where demolition was envisaged. One large patch extends right across Tower Green obscuring all from view, but photographed under ultra violet conditions the garden details, which are in water colour, show through quite clearly (see Fig. 3 & 4).

When read, the estimated cost of the report's recommendations attracted the considerable sum of £6697.2.7. The minute states that "his Majesty taking the said report into consideration was pleased to approve thereof, and did Order that it be, and it is hereby referred to the Right Honourable the Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to take care to provide money so soon as the State of his Majesty's affaires will permit." The fact that the coffers of the Treasury were invariably over-stretched no doubt explains the delay in carrying out some of the improvements. Not until the end of 1684 do the Ordnance accounts show any sign of progress on Tower Green.

The first entry refers to Thomas Moore, Carpenter, who was paid £7.10.00 on 29th November for "removing the Warders Guardhouse at the Bowling Green and setting the same up again"⁷. He also received an additional four shillings for "making a kirb for a Gate at the old Bowling Green." In March 1685, payment of £72.00.00 was made to Bricklayers John Downes and Robert Fitch for "works done in Pulling Downe the old Brickwall Round the Bowling Green . . . and building a new one on a straight line from the Bloody Tower unto the Hill Guard"⁸. In addition, they received two smaller sums for "a Brickwall Round the going up of the Stone Staires" and "a Brickwall at the sides of the Staires"; these two entries clearly refer to the steps at the eastern end of the garden passage previously mentioned.

Between 1682 and 1685 numerous payments were made to Bricklayers, Carpenters, Glaziers, and Blacksmiths for work done at the "Maine Guard." These concern the general maintenance of the building, including internal furnishing, along with minor alterations. As late as 11/16 April 1685, a warrant appeared authorising the painting of the "old Maine Guard upon the Hill"⁹. However, the life of the building was now rapidly nearing its end and in less than a month a similar warrant ordering the painting of the "new Maine Guard" was issued¹⁰. A warrant relating to the brickwork for the new Guard was issued on 4th May, and a contract with Messrs Downes and Fitch was signed twelve days later. The carpentry warrant appeared on 11th May.

The bricklayers' account was settled on 14th November 1685¹¹; the total amount, after deductions

6 Plates XXXIV & XLI.

7 WO51 29, folio 96.

8 *op. cit.*, folio 213.

9 WO51 31, folio 48.

10 *op. cit.*, folio 82.

11 *op. cit.*, folio 105-106.

TOWER GREEN 1975

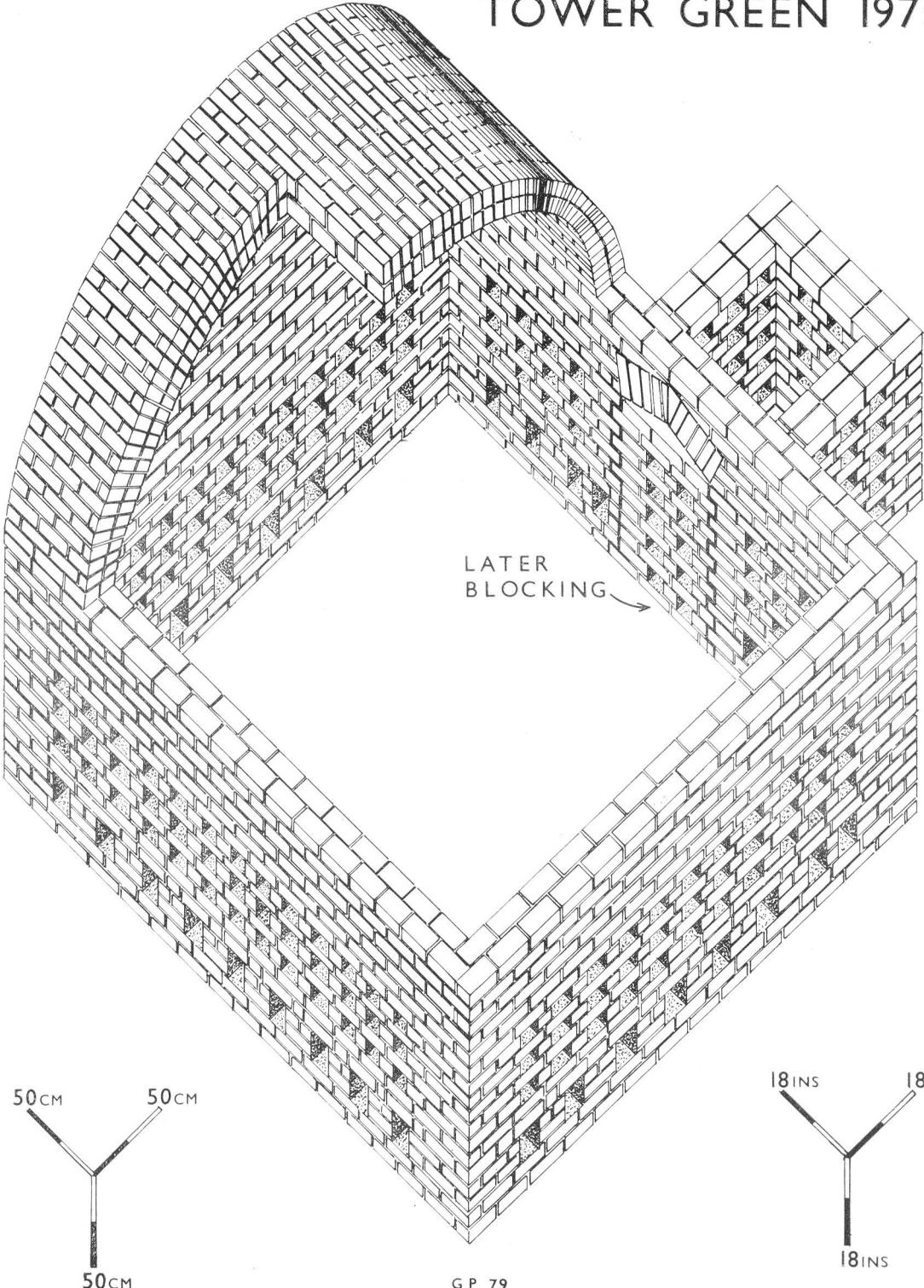


Fig. 5: Isometric of early seventeenth-century brick soakaway or settling tank.

for "old materials" came to £256.00.07. The major part of the bill covered the cost of building the main body of the structure, the walls being "15 foot high from Floare to Topp". "15 Rodds 240 feet of Brick-work" was employed "in the Foundations of the Guardhouse, Cistern and [?] Snife", while more modest entries included the building of "2 Large Chimneys" and "making 2 Hearths and setting 2 Gates".

The Carpenter's bill, settled on 12th November 1685¹², came to £216.02.03¼ after deductions for old materials. The painter's bill was cleared earlier on 28th October¹³, followed two days later by the mason's which accounted for "Paveing work . . . in and about the new Maine Guard"¹⁴. The final bill, settled during March 1686, was attributed to John Brewer, Glazier¹⁵.

The position of the new Maine Guard can be seen on the 1680 plan (see Fig. 3 & 4) north-west of the White Tower with what appears to be a platform to the south supporting 4 cannon (represented by the dots). In 1963, excavations in this area revealed two short lengths of brick foundations aligned roughly east-west approximately 20 feet (6.10m) apart, with the remains of a hard surface to the south which was interpreted as a "platform"¹⁶.

The report of 1681 referred to a new Guard on the hill "where the old one is at present". But an inspection of the 1680 plan under ultra violet revealed no trace of an earlier building under the patch. However, an unlabelled structure was identified between the Beauchamp Tower and the Upper Garden (unfortunately this has not been reproduced by the camera as it was not drawn in water colour). There seems little doubt that this was the site of the old Maine Guard and that the seventeenth-century surveyors regarded all the ground east of the Beauchamp Tower as belonging to the "Hill". Confirmation of the old Guard location was inadvertently provided by the indefatigable Samuel Pepys during his last recorded attempt at finding Barkstead's treasure¹⁷. On 19th November 1662, Pepys was "up and by appointment with Mr. Lee, Wade, Evett and workmen to the Tower, and with the Lieutenant's leave, set them to work in the garden in the corner against the Maineguard" (needless to say they did not find any treasure).

The existence of a building east of the Beauchamp

Tower can be traced back to the Agas panorama of circa 1570. A collection of mean structures are shown on the Tower Survey of 1597 (see Fig. 1) and a substantial L-shaped building on the Ogilby and Morgan survey of 1676. Perhaps the most tantalising view can be found in Hollar's survey of 1667, which illustrates an L-shaped building with four gables to the south, each containing two storeys and attic.

Traces of the old Maine Guard were found in 1975. The work comprised two phases of construction. The first, represented by a Tudor brick floor keyed into a contemporary ragstone wall, appeared to have been incorporated in an early seventeenth-century structure which contained orange coloured bricks (average size 8¾in x 3¾in x 2in) identical to those used in the nearby gardens. Contemporary with this period of work was a spacious brick-built soak-away or settling tank (see Fig. 5). The internal measurements of this vault were 9ft 9in x 10ft 6in (3.00 x 3.20m); the visible depth, from the surface of the unexcavated infill to the apex of the barrel roof, was 8ft 10in (2.70m). A small service shaft was incorporated into the east wall; at some later stage the shaft's doorway had been bricked in and the roof entrance sealed with stone slabs. The discharge chute into the vault was located in the top of the south wall.

Had the construction of the new Maine Guard been deferred for a few more years the Crown could have saved itself a number of unnecessary bills, because shortly after completion, the building had to be dismantled in advance of the construction of one of the most imposing military buildings of the period—the now vanished Grand Storehouse. All the buildings north of the White Tower, between the Chapel and the Martin Tower, were swept away *en masse* to accommodate the great building, and although the Guard was situated just south-west of the site, it too was to disappear. Demolition had presumably occurred by April 1688, when work on the Storehouse actually began; the Guard had certainly gone by 1692 when the Storehouse was completed.

Thus ended the short career of the new Maine Guard. If nothing else, the rediscovery of this ephemeral building helps to illustrate the prolific activity of the Board of Ordnance within the Tower which, on this particular occasion, proved to be rather a waste of time.

12 *op. cit.*, folio 106.

13 *op. cit.*, folio 82.

14 *op. cit.*, folio 84.

15 WO51 32, folio 59.

16 Details kindly supplied by B. K. Davison.

17 Colonel John Barkstead, a parliamentarian appointed Governor of the Tower in August 1652. He amassed a considerable amount of money during his governorship (reputedly under dubious circumstances) and was said to have buried it in the fortress before fleeing to the continent at the time of the Restoration.