Fig. 1: the earliest known view of the Tower, taken by George Hilditch and displayed at the Society of Arts London Exhibition in 1852. Note the condition of the upper part of Flamstead's Tower on the north-east corner of the White Tower (left) before the introduction of the great clock the following year. The iron railings and the embryonic garden were laid out in 1828 under the instructions of the Duke of Wellington, and together with the medieval road in the foreground beyond were sadly swept away in 2005.

The earliest stereograph of the Tower of London?

Geoffrey Parnell

The earliest known photograph we have of the Tower of London (Fig. 1) is that taken from Tower Hill by the artist and photographer George Hilditch (1803–57). The photograph, together with another general view of the Tower and one of the Bloody Tower, was exhibited at the Society of Arts London Exhibition of 1852, with a collection of landscapes (calotype) and portraits (collodion). It is possible that the photograph was taken a year or two before the exhibition. There is no doubt about the early, almost 'prehistoric', credentials, for the image records architectural details that are not found in any later photographs. The photograph, which was produced using the experimental calotype process, may lack definition, but it clearly shows the Beauchamp Tower on the inner curtain wall before it was subjected to a rather ruthless 'restoration' in 1852–3 at the hands of the Office of Works and their appointed architect Anthony Salvin.

The three buildings that can be seen on the Hilditch photograph in the Outer Ward between the Beauchamp and Devereux towers were formerly private houses belonging to the Mint; the two largest being occupied by the Surveyor of Meltings and the King's Assayer. These senior Mint officials had vacated their grand lodgings forty years earlier, and at the time the photograph was taken the buildings acted as temporary accommodation for military officers attached to the garrison, though proposals to demolish them were being considered and by 1855 they had gone.

A year after Hilditch first exhibited his Tower photographs a similar view of the fortress was taken and reproduced in stereographic form. The three unlabelled stereographs that have been identified, with different mounts and slightly different compositions, now form part of Paula Fleming's collection (see below), and are reproduced here for the first time (Figs. 2, 3 and 4).

The images are evidently salt prints, the product of a process invented and pioneered by the father of English photography, William Henry Fox Talbot. An identical image (Figs. 2 and 3) also appeared in a high-quality glass daguerreotype that forms part of the collection of the late Howarth-Loomes. The slide and most of the collection have been bequeathed to National

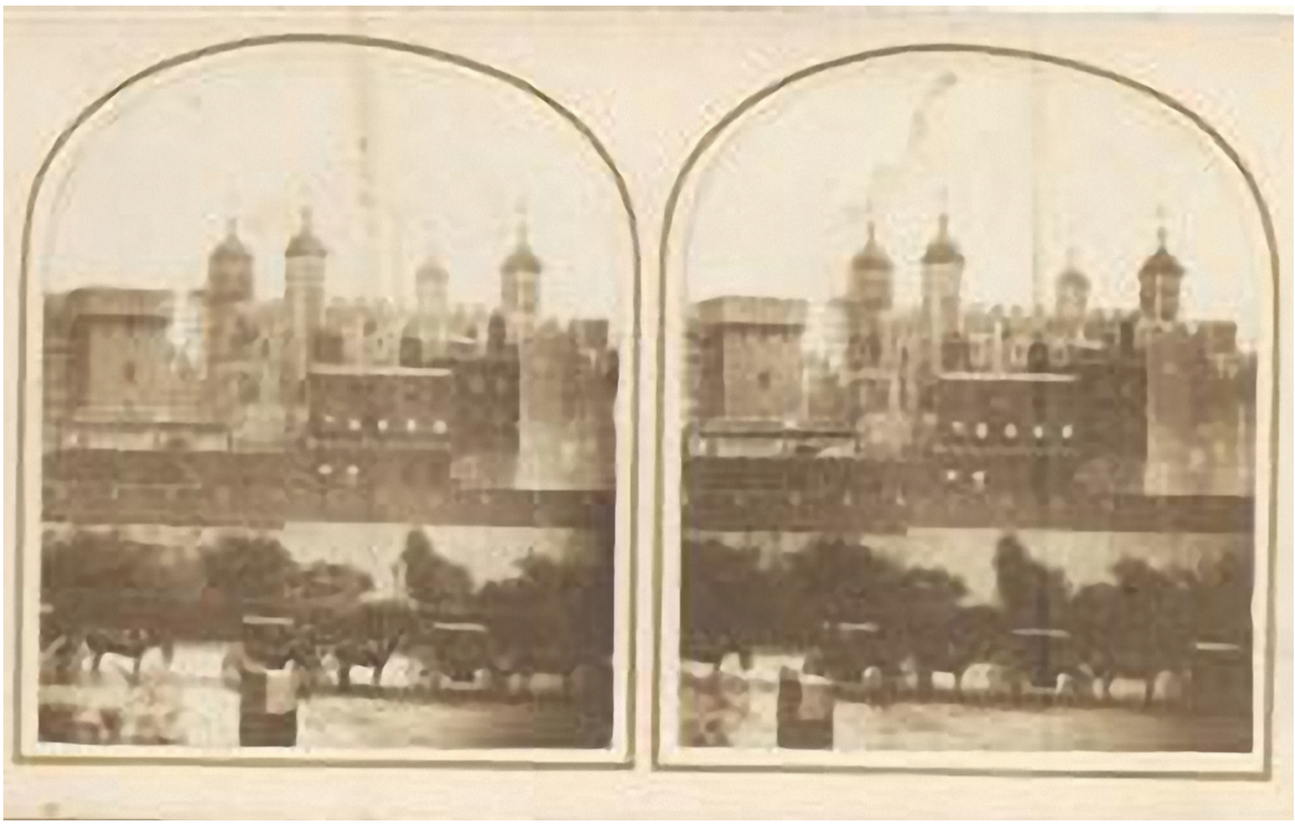

Fig. 2: salt print stereocard

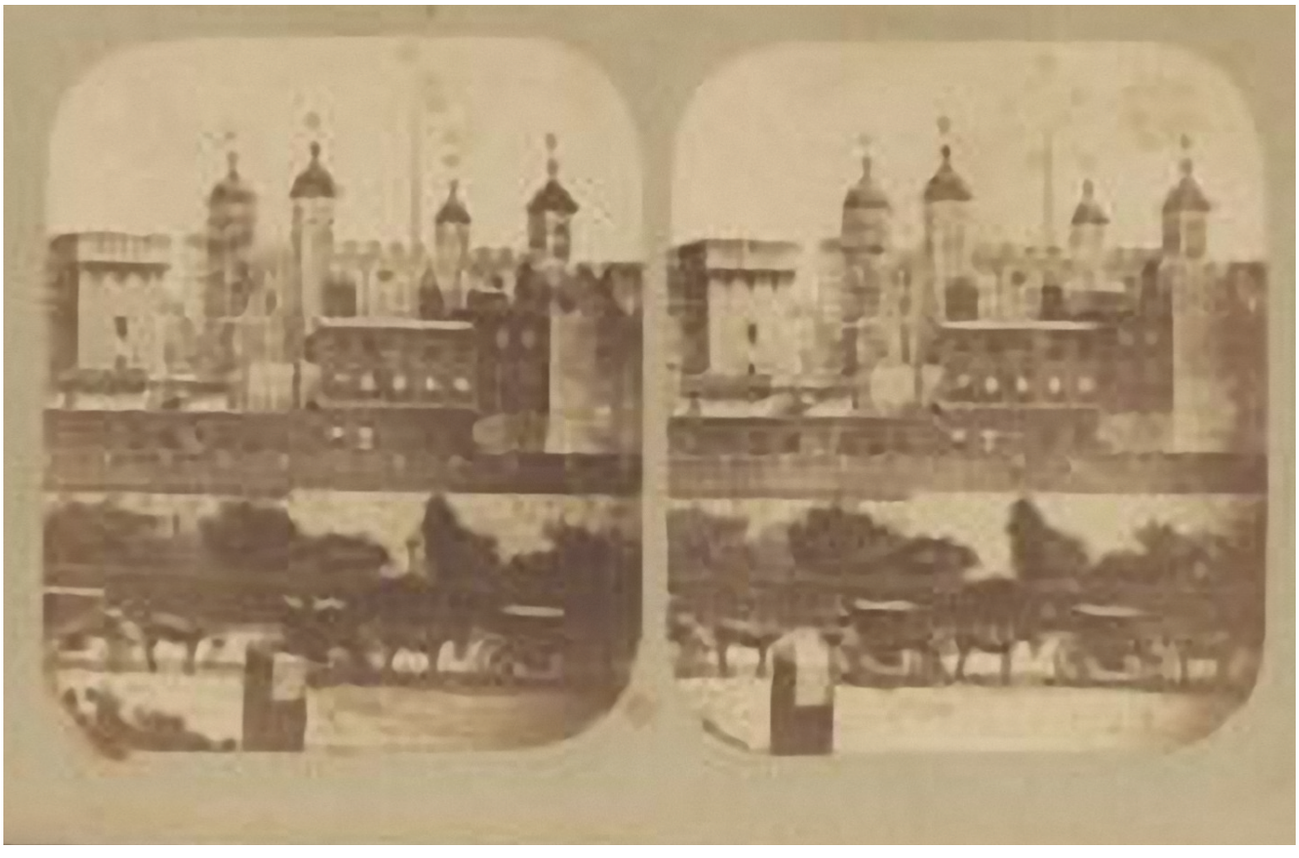

Fig. 3: a second salt print stereocard

Fig. 4: a third salt print stereocard. Although taken from a similar position on Tower Hill to the two earlier salt prints (Figs. 2 and 3) this photograph takes a wider view of the western defences of the fortress with the Devereux Tower clearly visible on the left hand side of the image. Traces of the Flamstead Tower clock faces are discernible, while the absence of the former Mint buildings on the north side of the Beauchamp Tower indicates that the photograph must have been taken after their demolition in 1856.

Museums Scotland, where it now appears buried and inaccessible. However, when the wonderfully eccentric Howarth-Loomes wandered into my office at the Tower in 1997, with a white plastic carrier bag full of daguerreotypes, he left me with a Polaroid copy of the slide which is reproduced here (Fig. 5).

The stereograph view is taken from the same position as Hilditch's photograph, that is to say the highest point of Tower Hill. At first glance the images look very similar, but closer inspection reveals some differences, notably the appearance of the Beauchamp Tower which had suffered 'restoration' since Hilditch took his picture. The seventeenth-century brick parapet has been removed; the entire face of the tower has been refaced and to facilitate the work part of the building immediately to the north (on the left), the former house of the Mint's Surveyor of Meltings, has been taken down. Although the architect Salvin supervised the removal of various accretions on the rear of the tower in 1851, his estimate for the restoration proper was not submitted until December 1852. It is therefore unlikely that work began on the Beauchamp Tower before January 1853.

Another detail of interest that the stereograph view contains is the presence of a substantial scaffold about Flamstead's Tower, the large circular turret on the north-east corner of the White Tower. This almost certainly relates to an enormous clock that was installed close to the summit of the turret in 1853, an event that helps to provide an accurate date for the photograph in the stereographs. The introduction of the four great cylindrical clock faces involved the removal of large amounts of original Norman masonry. This work of vandalism did not go unnoticed, and the *Times* in January 1854 stated that the act had caused public dismay at the damage it inflicted on 'that noble and ancient building'. The unloved, but spectacular, clock was taken down and the damaged masonry made good in 1913 (Fig. 6).

The stereograph image records the Beauchamp Tower in its restored state and therefore was unlikely to have been taken before June 1853 when building works concluded. Moreover, the view also indicates that the scaffold on Flamstead's Tower was still under construction. Bearing in mind that the cutting out of the masonry to receive the clock faces, the installation of the great clock mechanism and the making good of the fabric that followed, took at least six months, it may be concluded that the photograph was taken in June or July 1853.

In summary, it can be demonstrated that the image of the Tower was taken in the summer of 1853 and that it was subsequently employed in a daguerreotype and paper stereocards. The idea that a salt print image was reused some years later in the form that survives would suggest an 'archaeological' approach to manufacture, and it is more likely that the cards entered the market place shortly after the photograph was taken. The appearance of a mass-produced paper stereocard at this early date is significant, for it appears to predate other documented issues of stereo views, notably the claim by the London Stereoscopic Company in the *Photographic Journal* in February 1856 to have 'The largest collection in Europe, upwards of 10,000'.

Description of the Stereographs

By Paula Fleming

The first (Fig. 2) is composed of salt prints, bordered by a gold line, mounted on a thin, white mount 6 13/16" × 3 1/4" (slightly shorter then later standard cards). There is a nearly illegible pencil notation on the front,

Fig. 5: Polaroid copy of Howarth-Loomes daguerreotype showing the identical early salt print view from Tower Hill

Fig. 6: a photograph made in about 1895 showing the summit of the north-east turret of the White Tower fitted out as a clock tower in 1853. As a matter of historical interest, the first Astronomer Royal, John Flamstead, carried out observations from the top of this tower (hence the attribution 'Flamstead's Tower') following his appointment on 4 March 1675; his first recorded observation there was on 18 April 1675. The weather vane over his observatory was one of four made and installed by Ralph Greatorex and William Partridge six years earlier for the sum of £200.

"Tower of London", but no other identifications. This mount style was made popular by Auguste Marion, a Parisian producer of photographic papers and stereo dealer. His Paris studio was established in 1853, and in about 1857 he opened a branch in London. I cannot say for certain that Marion produced this mount, but it would not surprise me; they would have been produced when this image was made. Marion mounts can usually be identified by his imprint, "P.M." although I do not know when he started to add that to his papers. As for the salt print, they were popular from 1840 to 1855, and given the style of mount, especially the thickness, it could easily have been made in the early 1850s. Certainly it dates from that decade. Calotypes/salt prints have a simple binderless structure. The photo is composed of only one layer, which is formed directly on the paper. Uncoated calotypes have a matte surface and paper fibres can be seen within when magnified. The images were at risk from the same conditions that affect paper – rubbing, foxing, etc. To help counteract this, some salt prints were given a thin albumen varnish, which can make them difficult to differentiate from some albumen prints.[1]

The second card (Fig. 3) is composed of two prints, each with all four corners rounded, on a light grey mount, 6 13/16" × 3 1/4." On the reverse is a ms. notation in ink: "120. Tower of London." There are no maker's marks. The prints are either lightly albumenised salt prints, or albumen prints. As noted above, it is difficult to tell for sure without good magnification, but given the "feel" and colour of the images, I think they are albumenised salt prints. Real albumen prints are composed of two layers with the image formed in the sensitised second albumen layer. While the albumen tends to be rather shiny, certainly shinier then salt prints, they can have a somewhat matte surface. The mount for this card is thicker then the first example, indicating that it was likely produced at a slightly later time. This colour of mount was popular in the late 1850s to the early 1860s.

The third card (Fig. 4) is a "French tissue". The prints appear to be lightly albumenised salt prints, as paper fibres can be seen through the image. Unlike the above stereoviews with prints mounted on a solid backing cards, this view has been sandwiched between two pieces of cardboard with an opening cut out so that the image could be viewed normally in reflected light, but when held up against a light from behind, a transformation occurs. In this case, a night scene appears and the tower is engulfed in flames. The thin mount is a pinkish-cream with embossed decorations surrounding the images. There are no maker's marks or notations. The card probably dates to the early 1860s, and was either produced in France or else in the UK using French paper.

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 Monuments. He has undertaken numerous excavations at the Tower between 1973 and 1984 and has subsequently written and published widely on the archaeology of the site, and its buildings and institutions. Dr. Parnell is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

1. John Denis, editor of *Stereo World*, adds the following comment: 'Were we to publish it in *Stereo World*, some readers would inquire if we had converted a single photo to stereo in order to achieve such a perfect wide-base hyperstereo! Such stereos were certainly taken in the 1850s, but generally with sequential exposures between movements of the camera a foot or so. But here, the horses have not moved a single hoof between exposures – and the separation must be at least a metre. This would be a rare case of carefully synchronised exposures using widely separated cameras via linked pneumatic bulbs and hoses – or two operators opening shutters on the count of three?