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Compiled by

INTERIM REPORT ON MINT BASEMENT

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BACKGROUND TO THE INVESTIGATION

The chronology of briefs and the work actually undertaken has been rather complex: a resume follows:

At the end of March I was telephoned by Mr. Climo and asked to undertake an investigation of:

The south basement area of the Mint in relation to the proposed liftwell

The courtyard behind the Mint

At some future date, an investigation in Hyde Park Barracks

The first part of this brief was duly carried out and is detailed in Part 1 of this report.

In April I was asked by Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Burkett to extract and report on artefacts being removed from underfloor areas of Hyde Park Barracks. This work was carried out and the Artefactual Analysis submitted.

In May I received a written brief for the areas mentioned above.

In May I was contacted by Mr. Climo and asked to inspect a central area of the Mint Basement in which it was then proposed to site the liftwell. The south end of the basement area was no longer to be considered as such a site.

This work was begun and is reported on in Part 2 of this report.

In August I engaged in several conversations with Miss Temple of the National Heritage Council, Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Burkett as a result of which I began to plan work which would be undertaken in Hyde Park Barracks.

Further investigation of the central area of the Mint was awaiting the availability of workmen.

In October I telephoned Miss Temple to find out whether work at Hyde Park Barracks would commence.

She informed me that during my one month's absence abroad the programme of investigation has been extended and begun by a newly appointed co-ordinating archaeologist under the guidance of the advisory panel of the Heritage Council.

No notification of this was given to me by the Government Architect's Department.

In mid-October I received a written request from Mr. Burkett for a report on the Mint Basement and Hyde Park Barracks.

Since the work I had previously been requested to undertake at Hyde Park Barracks has now been incorporated into work being done by One co-ordinating archaeologist, a team of assisting archaeologists and the advisory panel of the National Heritage Council presumably a report on the site will come from them.

The report on the Mint basement follows.

Part 1

In April 1980 it was intended to locate a lift well in the south end of the Mint basement. Mr. Rod Climo suggested that I might investigate the area which would thus be opened up. Whilst such an opening up would not in itself be sufficient reason for an archaeological inspection there were other reasons which did suggest that such an inspection was warranted.

The reasons were as follow:

i) A lath and plaster ceiling was extant in this area of the basement. Since the area of head room between this ceiling and the present ground level was minimal it was conceivable that some build up of material had taken place on the surface which originally corresponded to the installation of the ceiling.

ii) The foundation trench for the stone wall might extend into this area and could, if such were the case, be recorded.

iii) a) The original ground level could be ascertained.

b) Preparation of the ground prior to construction of the building could be determined and recorded.

c) The natural horizons could be determined and recorded in order to produce information against which future excavations, archaeological or structural, could be checked.

The lath and plaster ceiling extended throughout the whole of the area forming the southernmost room in the basement.

Whilst many of the beams to which a lath and plaster ceiling might have been affixed in other areas had been removed in the few places where original timberwork remained no laths were, or had been, affixed.

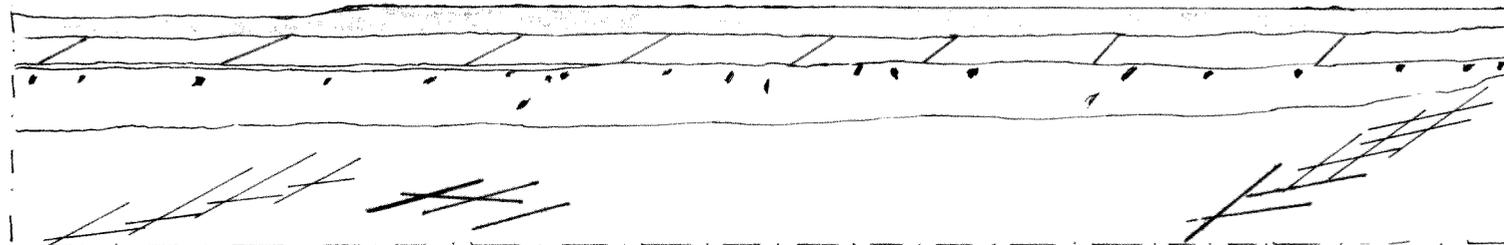
It was therefore possible to consider that the lath and plaster of the room under consideration was unique within the basement area. A corollary to this consideration is that a corresponding floor might have been laid at the time the ceiling was installed. No sign of such a floor surface was apparent on initial inspection but since the headroom between ceiling and the present ground level was minimal there may have been a considerable build up of material over any such posited floor. Such possibilities would be determined during this investigation.

It should perhaps be repeated here that the archaeological inspection was a corollary of the structural excavations. The archaeology was the result of planned excavation not the cause of it.

Within the total area which was to constitute the lift well space two trenches were opened up:

One trench of 1 metre by 1 metre in which I removed deposits down to a depth of 16 cms. This trench was located against the central part of the eastern wall of the building.

The second trench was excavated by government workmen for the purposes of the structural engineer. This was dug to a much greater depth and provided a control for the depth of my excavation. It was located in the north east corner of the room.



5cm

7.

-  Dust; building fabric
-  Mortar
-  Plaster

-  Clay with charcoal
-  Clay matrix
-  Laterite lens

The area within the one metre square trench consisted of the following:

Layer I This was comprised of a very loose matrix of dust with fragments of plaster, small pieces of mortar several laths and occasional fragments of 20th century glass. The appearance of the layer was of material which had gradually settled over a lengthy period of time.

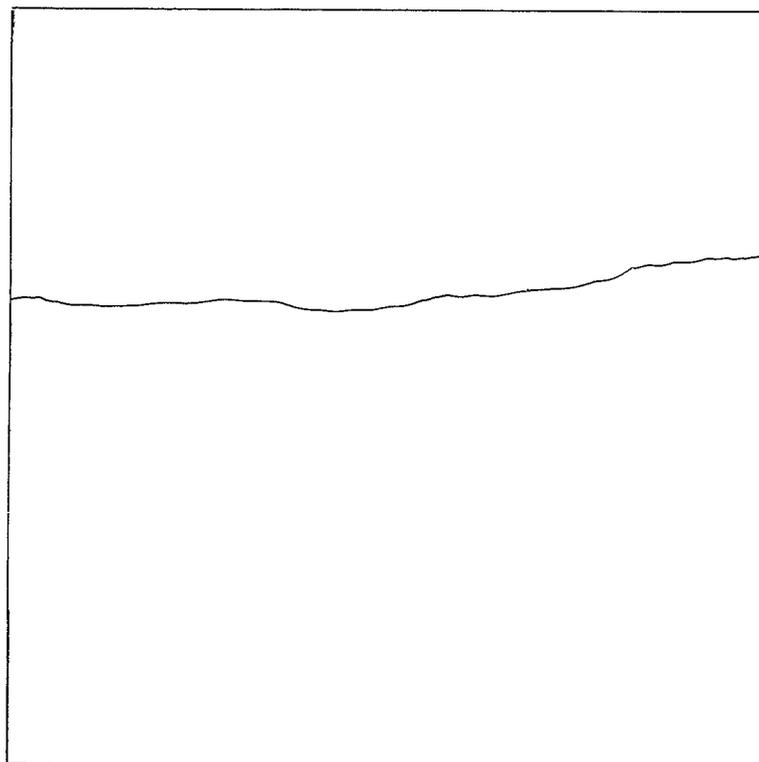
Layer II This was a very compacted composition of broken down mortar. None of the very loose matter from the layer above had been impressed into its surface, both layers were completely discrete. The layer itself was also completely sterile with no extraneous materials appearing throughout its depth of 4 cms. If this mortar layer had been deposited to provide a "floor" then, at least in this area of it, it had not been very much utilized. That it was intended to be a flooring was suggested by the evenness of its surface and by the homogeneous texture of the crushed mortar.

This mortar layer had been put down immediately after the plastering of the ceiling for a layer of such plaster directly underlies it. It might therefore be considered to be contemporary, or at least very soon after, the lath and plaster ceiling. If such was the case then the headroom between floor and ceiling at cl68 cms was still minimal. However as noted above the surface does not appear to have been very much used.

Layer III was a very thin layer of plaster. This layer did not extend all the way across the trench but stopped short of the wall (see plan page 9). The cut off line was sharply defined and gave the impression of having actually finished at that point rather than having been

worn away. A covering object possibly precluded the dropping of plaster at that point.

East Wall



Layer IV consisted of red-orange clay with a very high proportion of charcoal and was approximately 3 cms deep. Several interpretations of this layer need to be considered.

Firstly that the charcoal is representative of a land

clearance prior to building operations. After such a burning off the charcoal became mingled with a topsoil layer which was so minimal as to leave no separate discernible mark in the stratigraphic record.

Alternatively it is possible that the burning off took place and the top soil layer with at least part of the burnt vegetation was stripped away leaving only a portion of the charcoal to become trampled into the clay beneath.

These suppositions would need to be tested by comparisons with layers outside the building. Such a procedure would presumably be possible during the alterations to the courtyard area.

Layer Va was an extension of the clay layer but without the charcoal inclusions. There appeared also to be some slight difference in the matrix which may perhaps be attributable to the inclusion of some topsoil as outlined above. This judgement, however, may be a subjective one due to the difficulties of removing very compacted layers and to the poverty of the lighting in the basement. At its lowest extremity Layer Va was intersected by a lens designated Vb.

This Layer Vb was of lateritic composition (greyish brown matrix with very high pebble inclusions) Whilst it is at least conceivable that the laterite was deposited by man as a drainage or other purpose layer the lens effect argues against this and suggests that the layer is natural. Again this could be checked outside the building.

The above layers were checked in the section of the 75cm deep trench opened up for the structural engineer.

All the layers were present in this section and an additional layer could be discerned:

Layer VI This layer was of orange clay free of laterite lenses.

No foundation trench was visible at any point.

The results of this investigation in relation to the initial questions posed were as follow:

i) This query had been answered by determining that material apparently intended as flooring had been laid and that there had been no great build up on top of this.

Added to this was the fact that the area appeared not to have been intensively utilized when the ceiling and the flooring processes had been carried out.

ii) No sign of foundation trench was observed within the basement area.

iii) The information concerning preparation of the area before construction will be viable only when a comparative area is inspected outside the building.

The data concerning original ground levels and geological make up will have more relevance when compared with neighbouring data.

Part 2

The site of the proposed lift well was thereafter altered to bring it within the hatched area shown on page 13. This original basement room had been divided by a stone and brick wall running north south and the hatched area had been almost completely filled with some form of packing. The western side of the division contained a much smaller amount of what initially appeared to be a somewhat similar material.

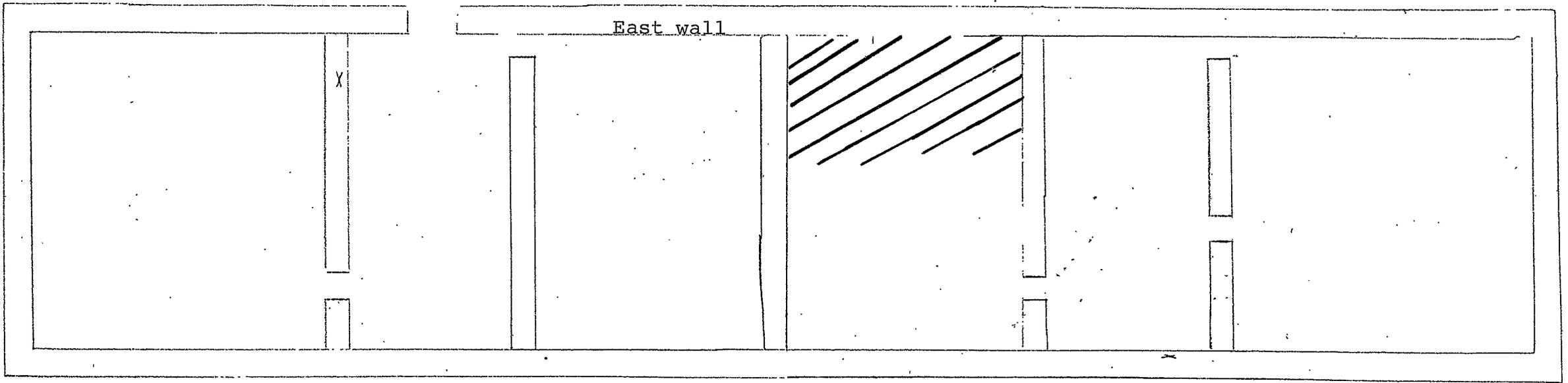
The removal of this fill was a preliminary part of the lift well operations and because the reason for, and the makeup of, the material was not immediately apparent I was asked to inspect the area during such removal.

The above mentioned dividing wall was of stone with a facing of brick. The brick may have been added at a later date to the original wall of stone. The purpose of the wall was apparently to support the sagging main beam above it.

The purpose of the fill on the eastern side of the central wall is not so readily definable. At the time of writing workmen at the Mint have removed only a small amount of this material which consists predominantly of broken down mortar mixed with small pieces of coal or coke. The mortar is generally in a completely crushed form but occasional lumps of consolidated mortar also occur.

As far as could be seen at this stage there appears to be a discrete layer of domestic rubbish below this first layer. This has been no more than partially disclosed but within this small uncovered area could be seen a shoe, bones, glass and brick fragments.

The fill slopes from the eastern (main) wall where



Sketch showing area of Mortar and coke/coal in Mint basement.

it is some 44 cms below the floor boards to the central wall where it is some 60 cms below the boards. At such levels it seems unlikely that it was even intended to support this flooring even before any subsidence of the layers occurred.

On the western side of the basement is a shallow layer of mortar brick and stones. On the basis of a brief inspection the material appears somewhat similar to that on the other side of the central supporting wall but with the mortar generally occurring as consolidated lumps and with considerable quantities of building rubble such as the stone and brick.

Since the archaeological inspection was dependant on the presence of Mint workmen it ceased when these were withdrawn. A report on this area is obviously no more than an interim record of work to date.

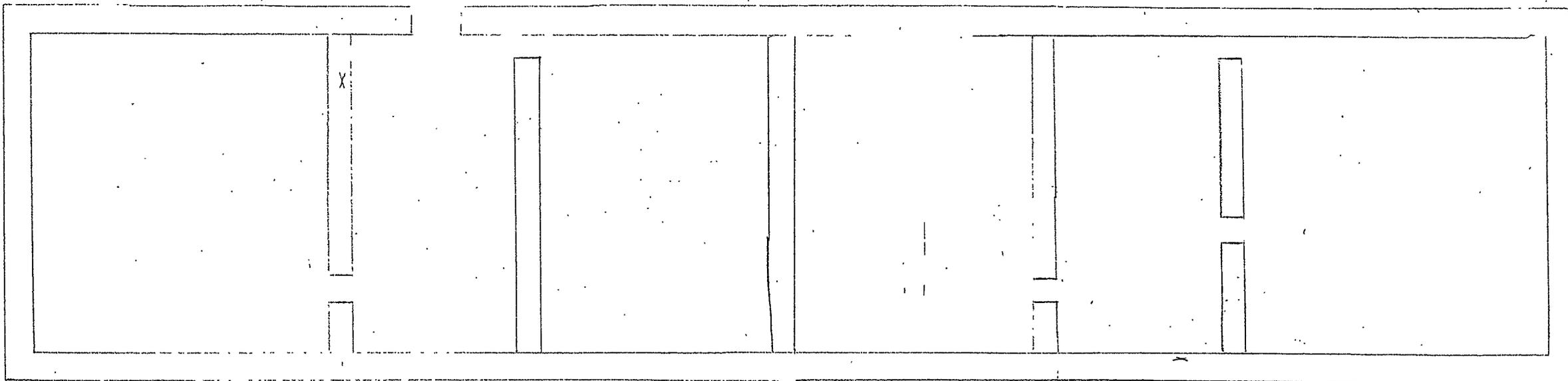
Part 3

The places of access into the basement and between different parts of it have probably been altered over time. Whilst the apparently arbitrary locations of some of these access ways may be related to either or both of the areas discussed in sections 1 and 2 no immediate pattern is obvious.

The position of the various doorways in the basement is indicated on Page 16. The position of two possible keystones is also shown. Both of these stones occur in the basement lobby areas although on different walls of each lobby.

That two entrance ways were a part of the original basement area is indicated in the Bigge Report. The report notes that "On the eastern side of the south wing are two doorways into a cellar which is formed in the basement between the wall under the columns and the main wall of the building - over these openings are located lintels of timber...".

Possibly one of these doorways is that later converted into the barrel vault tunnel and shown on the sketch. The other, or its original position, may still be obscured by outbuildings.



Sketch showing doorways into and between different parts of the Mint basement.

NOT EXACTLY TO SCALE