

Dig It



Archaeologists measure arc of windmill foundation

Early in 2003, an excavator machine working its way through Distillery Lane to lay new sewer infrastructure hit a snag, or, more precisely, a curved wall-like structure. Excavation was quickly halted and a professional archaeologist called in to do a proper study of whether or not the foundations of the 1832 windmill lay here, in the corner formed by Buildings 31 and 33.

Archaeologists canvassed archival records; old maps, plans, paintings, and prints of the windmill were carefully inspected. (Some of these have been reproduced in earlier heritage articles.) The team also interviewed Paul Allsopp, a former distillery plant manager who remembered seeing windmill fragments uncovered *inside* Building 31 (on the right in the photograph) during renovations for Hiram Walker in 1986.

In the field, after carefully peeling away the surface asphalt, the archaeologists discovered sections of foundation, still intact, 60 cm (24 inches) below the pavement. In good archaeological fashion, team members dug, sifted, brushed, measured, mapped, and photographed their way to some solid conclusions.

We now know that the 175-year-old Gooderham & Worts windmill was 10.2 m (33.4 feet) in diameter at its base, and stood on a broad circular foundation, 90 cm (36 inches) thick, composed of limestone rubble. A brick arch was discovered piercing the foundation near Building 31, perhaps to allow grain to be transported underground from the mill to auxiliary buildings. Resting on top of the brick arch was a 40 cm (15 inch) block of cut stone that was later incorporated into the foundation of Building 31. No attempt was made to excavate the interior of the foundation; and an attempt to determine how deep the foundations were had to be abandoned when groundwater poured into the excavation. (Remember, the 1832 windmill stood on the shore of Toronto Bay.)

After completing their fieldwork, archaeologists covered the exposed foundations with geotextile fabric and backfilled the excavation with sand to protect the archaeological remains. A red-brick

arc was then placed directly over the foundations to commemorate the historic structure and the important role it played in the history of Gooderham & Worts and the City of Toronto. When you stand on that arc, you can almost hear the creaking of the windmill sails, the grinding of the millstones, and the shouts of labourers going about their work.



Foundation abutting Building 31



Close-up of brick arch in foundation

Photographs are from a report by Archaeological Services Inc. for ERA Architect Inc.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com.