

**Christchurch Choir School,  
3a Brewer Street, Oxford**

**Planning Application no: NFH/0154/93  
NGR SP 51350 05880**

**Summary**

A watching brief of groundwork was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) in September 1993 at Christchurch Choir School, 3a Brewer Street, Oxford on behalf of Broadway Malvan who were acting for Christchurch. The top of a culvert which is probably part of the Trill Mill stream was seen as well as a deposit of garden soil.

**Background**

The site lies to the S of the medieval City Wall on the S side of Oxford. The Trill Mill stream runs through the S of the site. The stream originated as a mill leat which followed the contour line of the S end of the gravel promontory on which Oxford sits and which runs E-W from S of the Castle Mill. The course splits to the S of the site to run E-W and N-S. The stream overflowed its original course to follow a wider channel which probably fills half of the area between Rose Place and Brewer Street. It was later culverted in an open culvert on a more southerly line which can be seen on maps dated from 1578 to 1789. It now runs beneath Rose Place and next to the Clarks House in a closed culvert. A brook was observed in 1891 or 1892 at the SE corner of the new choir school (Hurst 1899, 33). In 1971 a stream course was seen under the youth club in Littlegate Street (Durham).

Agas's and Hollar's Maps (1578 and 1643) show the site as garden/orchard. Loggan (1678) shows buildings and these were to become Pembroke Mews which were demolished for the Choir School extension in 1891/2.

**Strategy**

The strategy was to inspect the groundworks once they had been dug but before the drains and foundations were inserted. The sections were cleaned and were to be drawn if any archaeological deposits were observed. After inspecting the sides of the trenches no deposits were investigated further because only modern rubble was present apart from the culvert at the SE corner of the site (see Fig.).

**Results (see Fig.)**

During the first site visit by J Moore a closed stone culvert aligned E-W was observed which turned to run S at the SE corner of the site. The culvert was built of unmortared large rectangular blocks (0.75x0.15 m) and had been blocked at both ends by small square blocks. During the last site visit by M Roberts the top of a flat brick built structure was seen to the S of the location of this culvert which was not visible at the time.

A sondage was dug by the contractors to locate a water pipe; this was 1.2 m deep and revealed 0.7 m of building rubble over 0.5 m of garden soils. These overlay a 0.1 m deep deposit of hard gravel with limestone which overlay in turn

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a dark loam of unknown depth.

During other site visits the drains were inspected and only modern rubble was seen. The excavations for the ground beams were inspected and only modern rubble was seen.

One borehole was drilled to establish the ground conditions. It showed 3 m of built up ground (clay) with clinker and brick overlying a layer of peat. This is comparable with the results of the boreholes to the E of the Squash court on the E of the site which showed the wider channel of the Trill Mill Stream.

### **Conclusions**

The course of a closed culvert for the Trill Mill stream was seen to turn to the W from the N-S alignment. This may be a culvert built at one edge of the large channel. The ground investigation shows a deep deposit of silt over peat to the N of the culvert which may reflect the wide unchannelled course of the stream. The compact layer of gravel may lie at the N side of the channel.

The compact gravel was undated and may be older than the 16th century. It may represent a surface connected with rear of property activity, such as butchery, which would be better conducted near to running water. The garden soils were undated but may be a result of the use of the site as garden/orchard from 1578 to the middle of the 17th century. The site had buildings (in the 19th-century Pembroke Mews) on or near it from 1678 to recently. The closed stone culvert may have been a water source for these buildings leading into the Trill Mill Stream. A school extension was built on the site in 1891/2 and replaced in the 1930s. The recently demolished school building had been levelled and built up further with compacted aggregate to enable the piling rig to operate for the current works.

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COUNTY

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