



# **Royal Cornwall Infirmary, Truro Cornwall**

## **Archaeological recording**



## **Historic Environment Projects**



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## **Archaeological recording**

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## **Acknowledgements**

This study was commissioned by Linden Homes and carried out by Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council.

The Project Manager was Nigel Thomas.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Historic Environment Projects and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

## **Freedom of Information Act**

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## **Cover illustration**

North-east façade of the original Infirmary building

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## **Abbreviations**

CRO	Cornwall County Record Office
EH	English Heritage
HER	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
HE	Historic Environment, Cornwall Council
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRN	Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER
RIC	Royal Institution of Cornwall

## **1 Summary**

Historic Environment Projects (Cornwall Council) were commissioned by Linden Homes to carry out archaeological recording during the conversion of the Royal Cornwall Infirmary (more recently known as Truro City Hospital) located in the centre of Truro at NGR SW 8233 4459. This work was requested by Nina Paternoster (Senior Conservation Officer) and Dan Ratcliffe (Historic Environment Advice Team Leader) in order to record a well and culvert which had been uncovered inside the building during groundworks.

The Royal Cornwall Infirmary was originally built during the 1790s but underwent several phases of extensions and alterations during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both the well and culvert were located in lower ground floor rooms within the original part of the building.

The well was discovered to be sub-rectangular in plan but was not aligned with the walls of the building. This indicates the possibility that the well was present before the construction of the hospital. Its location within a room directly north of the former kitchen, suggests that even if it pre-dated the building it almost certainly served as an original water source for the Infirmary.

The section of brick-built culvert is located running from south-east to north-west below the floor level of the former kitchen. It is a feature that was inserted at a later date (probably during the 19<sup>th</sup> century) since it is aligned with and diverted through the door openings rather than under the walls of the kitchen. The culvert appears to have served as a 19<sup>th</sup> century drainage system taking water under the lower ground floor from south-east to north-west. It was later truncated to the north-west by the construction of a lift shaft during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and also to the south-east when a concrete floor and new service trenches were inserted in the neighbouring room. Its original extent in both directions is unknown.

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Project background**

Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council was commissioned by Patrick Colledge of Linden Homes to undertake archaeological recording of two features unearthed during conversion works to the Royal Cornwall Infirmary (more recently known as Truro City Hospital, see Fig 1 for location). This was prompted by the involvement of the Senior Conservation Officer (Nina Paternoster) who recognised the need for an archaeological record of the structures prior to further alterations to the building.

The City Hospital closed in the late 1990s and the site is now being redeveloped as housing. An archaeological assessment of the hospital and grounds was undertaken by HE Projects in advance of the initial demolition and groundworks (Cole 2004).

The original Royal Cornwall Infirmary building was constructed in the 1790s and had major extensions added in the 1860-70s, in 1908 and in the late 1930s. the site is now a Grade II listed building (List Entry Number: 1280725).

### **2.2 Aims**

The principal aims of the work were to:

- To record both the well and the culvert.
- To deposit the archive with the relevant museum and disseminate the results of discoveries as a concise archive report.

Questions put forward by the Conservation Officer were as follows:

- What was the function and date of the culvert?
- What was the relationship of the culvert and well to the building?
- What was the relationship of the well to the culvert?
- Is there a relationship between the inscription C/D 9ft OFF (cut into the north-west extension) to the culvert?

### **2.3 Methods**

The archaeological programme followed four stages: rapid desk-based assessment, fieldwork, archiving and reporting.

#### **2.3.1 Desk-based assessment**

During the desk-based assessment historical databases and archives were consulted in order to obtain information about the history of the site and the structures and features that were likely to survive. The main sources consulted were as follows:

- Cornwall HER
- Images of England online listed buildings database
- Early maps and photographs (see Section 7.1)
- Published histories (see Section 7.2)

#### **2.3.2 Fieldwork**

Archaeological recording was carried out on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012 after the discovery of the well and culvert which were exposed during removal of the existing floor surfaces by the building contractors. By the time of the site visit the top surface of the culvert had been completely cleared and cleaned and the well had been made safe by the insertion of a concrete cap with covered opening. Both features were recorded as appropriate and located on a measured plan (see Fig 8). A archive quality monochrome photographic



record was created along with a digital photographic record for illustrative purposes. No artefacts were recovered during the course of the works.

### 2.3.3 Post-fieldwork

The site archive was collated. This included:

- Preparation of finished measured drawings.
- Archiving of drawings, photographs, paperwork and digital files.
- Preparation of HE and Archive Index forms.
- Production of this report.
- Completion of an English Heritage OASIS form.

## 3 Location, setting and designations

The Royal Cornwall Infirmary (Truro City Hospital) is located to the south of the city centre on the west side of Infirmary Hill, at NGR SW 8233 4459 (Fig 1). It is a Grade II listed building originally constructed in the 1790s.

The listed building description reads:

*Infirmary hospital. 1799 datestone. By William Wood, architect and overseer of Lemon Street development. Local freestone ashlar walls; dry Delabole slate mansard roof with open pediments over entrance and fronting cross wing on right; roof dormers with pediments. Shallow depth plan. 3 storeys plus attic over basement; nearly symmetrical 3:3:3-bay north front with taller central bays broken forward and rising to 4 storeys with open pediment plus similar pediment to 3-storey 3-window projecting cross wing on the right; first-floor sill string and moulded cornice to parapets; flat arches over original hornless sashes with glazing bars. Doorway, central to main block, has moulded architrave and hood on consoles and date 1799 to frieze; 6-panel door with 3-pane over light; above is sash with round-arched recessed surround over an apron with the Cornish Arms flanked by swags over guttae. Third floor has sash within similar but plainer recessed panel with stepped key block. To middle of other bays to first floor are aprons inscribed "Cornwall and Infirmary". Cross wing has 3-linked moulded segmental arches to ground floor, moulded round arches over Corinthian capitals to first floor and rusticated round arch to middle of 2nd floor; blind central windows. INTERIOR not inspected.*

The site lies within the Conservation Area of Truro. The underlying bedrock is Middle Devonian mudstone, siltstone and sandstone (CC GIS mapping) and the land lies at a height of 25m OD. Recent housing development has occurred within the grounds of the former hospital to the south and west of the Infirmary building.

## 4 Site history

The following site history has been taken from the 2004 assessment report (Cole 2004).

'A detailed history of the Royal Cornwall Infirmary, "The First Cornish Hospital" by Dr. C. T. Andrews, was published in 1975. It charts the history of the institution from its foundation in 1799 through to 1938.

H. L. Douch wrote "in July 1790, largely with the encouragement of Sir Francis Basset, the Sheriff convened a county meeting 'to consider the propriety of establishing a county hospital.' As a result, a subscription list was opened for a "A Publick Informary for the Sick and Lame Poor.'" In October it was announced that the project had been honoured with the patronage of HRH the Prince of Wales, thus giving it the title of the Royal Cornwall Infirmary. There was a tardy

completion of the plan for, although it was announced in November 1791 that the building would be erected by William Wood ... to Mr Ebdon's design, the Infirmary was not completed until May 1799. The matron, porter and other members of staff were 'elected' in June and the first patients were received on August 12<sup>th</sup>, the birthday of the Royal patron. Although the RCI from the outset was a county establishment, it was always of primary benefit to Truro simply by virtue of its being in the town and many of its poor patients being recommended by Truro residents" (Douch 1977).

The Royal Cornwall Infirmary was the first Cornish hospital, followed by a number of others including the East Cornwall Hospital at Bodmin, Miner's Hospital, Redruth and the West Cornwall Hospital at Penzance, which opened in the 1850s, 1871 and 1874 respectively (Andrews 1975).

The Plan of the Manor of Newham, 1831 (Fig 3) shows the Infirmary as a single rectangular structure. The Tithe Map of c1840 (not reproduced) and Richard Symons map of Truro, 1848 (Fig 4) both show an extension to the rear (south-west) of the building, though its absence on the earlier map may have been due to the accuracy of the cartography. Symon's Map also records buildings to the west of the Infirmary and sub-divisions to the south including a garden area with paths (Cole, 2004).

The first of the many building works carried out on the Royal Cornwall Infirmary was the North Wing, added to the original hospital building in 1867-8. Dr Andrews writes that it was "decided that donations should be solicited throughout the county towards the provision of a new wing. A very liberal response by the public to this appeal enabled the governors to go to tender in May 1867. The new extension ... was opened in the following year" (1975, 76). He added also that the Hospital had sixty-two beds at this point. The Royal Cornwall Gazette visited the Hospital in July 1869 and wrote "the new extension has been opened ... entering by the front door and passing through the present hall we turn left and find ourselves in the accident ward. The ward is illuminated by gas brackets, the walls enlivened by paintings presented by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel" (Andrews 1975).

The Ordnance Survey map of c1880 (Fig 5) shows both the original hospital with the North Wing, as well as a further extension to the south which had been presumably constructed between 1868 and the date of the map. The map also shows considerable tree planting around the Infirmary.

There were "improvements on the surgical side in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Between 1886 and 1900 the number of operations increased four-fold and the number of casualties dealt with six-fold" (Palmer 1994) – all achieved through "improved surgical techniques."

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was also an increase in specialisations at the Hospital. The "operating theatre had been modernised and was claimed by the surgical staff to be the equal of any in the kingdom. The use of anaesthesia had opened up the field of abdominal surgery. A radiological service was provided for the Infirmary with the appointing of Mr L. C. Panting to the staff in 1902 for he brought with him his own equipment. This was updated in 1907 when Mr George Petherick presented the hospital with a new X-ray plant. Electricity had to be installed in order to work this. Specialist departments had also been started. The hospital first specialised in opthamology in 1889 and in 1901 half of the 189 operations were in this specialisation. The eye department acquired its own operating theatre and in 1912, 193 operations were carried out. In 1894 a dental surgeon had been appointed" (Palmer 1994).

It was also during the Edwardian period that the hospital was opened up to a wider number of patients. "Previously, it had been regarded as a hospital for the poor ... the middle and upper classes were either treated at home or went to

hospitals elsewhere in the country. A new wing was added to the Infirmary in 1908, which "provided an opportunity to increase the numbers of bedrooms for the nursing staff from nine to twelve" (Andrews 1975). Andrews also notes that in the First World War, the hospital provided accommodation for a large number of wounded soldiers.

The Ordnance Survey map from the (mid) 1930s (not reproduced) shows the 1908 extension for the first time as well as other small extensions to the original hospital.

In the late 1930s, the hospital underwent a major expansion, with the construction of the main hospital extension in 1937-9, its two wings flanking an open area encircling a water feature.

When the Second World War broke out, "one of the first moves was the protection of the hospital. The Royal Cornwall Infirmary ... had only recently been enlarged. 'Ramparts' made up when complete of 25,000 so-called sandbags - actually filled with earth excavated during recent extensions to the rear of the building - were erected there, and 'sitting-up patients' were sent home" (Acton and Acton 2002). In spite of all these preparations, nine to twelve people were killed (accounts vary) following a direct hit on the hospital during an air-raid on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1942. "The bomb ... fell near the main entrance, destroying the dispensary and the ends of the medical ward and the male and female surgical wards" (Acton 2002).

The infirmary became part of the National Health Service in 1947 and from this time, there was a considerable growth in the number of buildings on the Truro City Hospital site.

The City Hospital closed on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1999, apart from the "Genito-urinary medicine clinic and mental health units" (Acton and Acton 2002, 239), which closed soon after.' (Cole, 2004).

## **5 Archaeological results**

(See site plan, Fig 8, for locations of features)

Both the well and the culvert were located on the lower ground floor of the Infirmary building. The well was located in a room set centrally at the front of the original 1790s building whilst the culvert lay directly to the south-west below the floor of a former kitchen in part of the building which had been constructed by c1840. In both rooms the existing 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete floors had been removed by the building contractors prior to the site visit.

When the floor was removed in the room containing the well three large reused granite posts or lintels were revealed covering top of the well opening (Fig 13). A lead pipe was also noted feeding into the opening. Due to safety concerns the posts/lintels and lead pipe were removed and the well was capped with a concrete slab prior to the site visit. The granite posts/lintels were later found to be 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier evidenced by wedge splitting quarry marks (Fig 13).

The well (Fig 9), located to the north-west of the centre of the room adjacent to a fireplace in the north-west wall, comprised an un-lined, sub-rectangular shaft with rounded corners cut through the slate bedrock to a depth of at least 17m. The shaft was aligned roughly north-south and did not match the alignment of the building, suggesting that it may have been present before the construction of the Infirmary. It measured approximately 1m north-south by 0.6m east-west except in the top metre where the opening widened into an irregular cut measuring approximately 2m north-south by 1m east-west. It seems likely that the irregular cut at the top of the shaft was caused by the removal of a well head structure (probably a hand pump at a later date). Cut into the east and west sides of the top half of the shaft were a series of rounded sockets which may have originally supported timber staged platforms used either

during construction or to ease lifting of buckets during use. Alternatively they may have supported timber lining in the upper section of well. The top of the water lies at 13.5m below the floor surface and appears deep turquoise in colour.

At the time of the site visit the top of the culvert, located below the floor level in a former kitchen, had been exposed and cleaned by the building contractors (Figs 10 and 11). This feature was aligned approximately north-south crossing the length of the room and entering through a doorway in the south-east wall and exiting through a doorway in the north-west wall where it could be seen continuing through into the next room although had been truncated close to the door opening by later ground disturbance. The culvert was set in a trench dug through the slate bedrock measuring 0.78m wide by 0.78m with vertical sides and a flat base. The cut was lined on the base and sides with red brick bonded with lime mortar and capped on the top with arched, stretcher bond brickwork also bonded with lime mortar. Each brick measured 0.23m x 0.08m x 0.07m. The culvert sloped down gently from south to north and internally was filled almost to the top with a layer of mid greyish brown silty clay containing frequent small shillet fragments and occasional flecks/small fragments of coal.

## 6 Conclusions/discussion

The aims of the recording work were to create an archaeological record of the well and the culvert whilst they were exposed and to answer questions put forward by the Conservation Officer.

The well is almost certainly earlier than the infirmary building in a constructional sense since its alignment is not square with the building. The sinking of the well shaft probably took place before the building was erected around it. The well is, however, likely to have been used throughout most of the history of the building's use and is conveniently located close to the former kitchen within the service area of the building. The discovery of a lead pipe feeding into the well suggests that at some point the top was covered and a hand pump installed.

The brick culvert is a later, inserted feature (19<sup>th</sup> century) and has no association with the well. It is clear that it was constructed after the part of the building in which it is located, since it has been designed to pass through existing door openings. This part of the building appears to have been constructed at some point between 1831 and 1848 (Figs 3 and 4) although Symons map of Truro dated 1831 may not be wholly accurate and this south-west range is more likely to be part of the original build. The original extent of the culvert to the south-east and north-west is unknown but it was presumably inserted to drain water (either external surface water or waste water from a wash room) under the building from the south-east side leading out to the north-west.

There are two stones in the north-west elevation of the building either side of the door opening both incised with 'C/D 9ft OFF'. This end of the building is part of a north-west extension added in 1868. What the inscriptions refer to is unclear but there is no evidence to suggest that they are linked in any way to the position of the culvert.

## 7 References

### 7.1 Primary sources

Ordnance Survey, c1880. *25 Inch Map* First Edition (licensed digital copy at HE)

Ordnance Survey, c1907. *25 Inch Map* Second Edition (licensed digital copy at HE)

Ordnance Survey, 2007. *Mastermap Digital Mapping*

Truro in 1813 (from one inch OS Map)

Plan of the Manor of Newham in 1831

Tithe Map and Apportionment, c1840. *Parish of Kenwyn* (microfiche copy at HE)

Richard Symons map of Truro, 1848 (from Truro Buildings Research Group, 1985)

## 7.2 Publications

Acton, V., 1997, *A History of Truro, Vol. 1*, Landfall Publications, Devoran

Acton, B, and Acton, V., 2002, *A History of Truro, Vol. 2*, Landfall Publications, Devoran

Andrews, Dr CT, 1975. *The First Cornish Hospital* Penzance

Cole, R, 2004. *Truro City Hospital Archaeological Assessment* Unpublished HE report  
Truro

Douch, H. L., 1977. *The Book of Truro*, Barracuda Books, Buckinghamshire

Palmer, J., (ed) 1994. *Edwardian Truro*, Truro.

Truro Buildings Research Group, 1984. *Lemon Street and its Neighbourhood*, Truro.

Truro Buildings Research Group, 1985. *River Street and its Neighbourhood*, Truro

## 7.3 Websites

<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/> English Heritage's online database of  
Sites and Monuments Records, and Listed Buildings

## 8 Project archive

The HE project number is **146146**

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of Historic Environment, Cornwall Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration.
2. Electronic drawings stored in the directory ..\CAD ARCHIVE\Sites T\Truro Infirmary 2012
3. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: GBP 2247
4. Digital photographs stored in the directory ..\Images\Sites Q-T\Truro Infirmary 2012
5. English Heritage/ADS OASIS online reference: cornwall2-126888

This report text is held in digital form as: ..\HE Projects\Sites T\Truro\Truro Infirmary 2012\Truro Infirmary report 2012

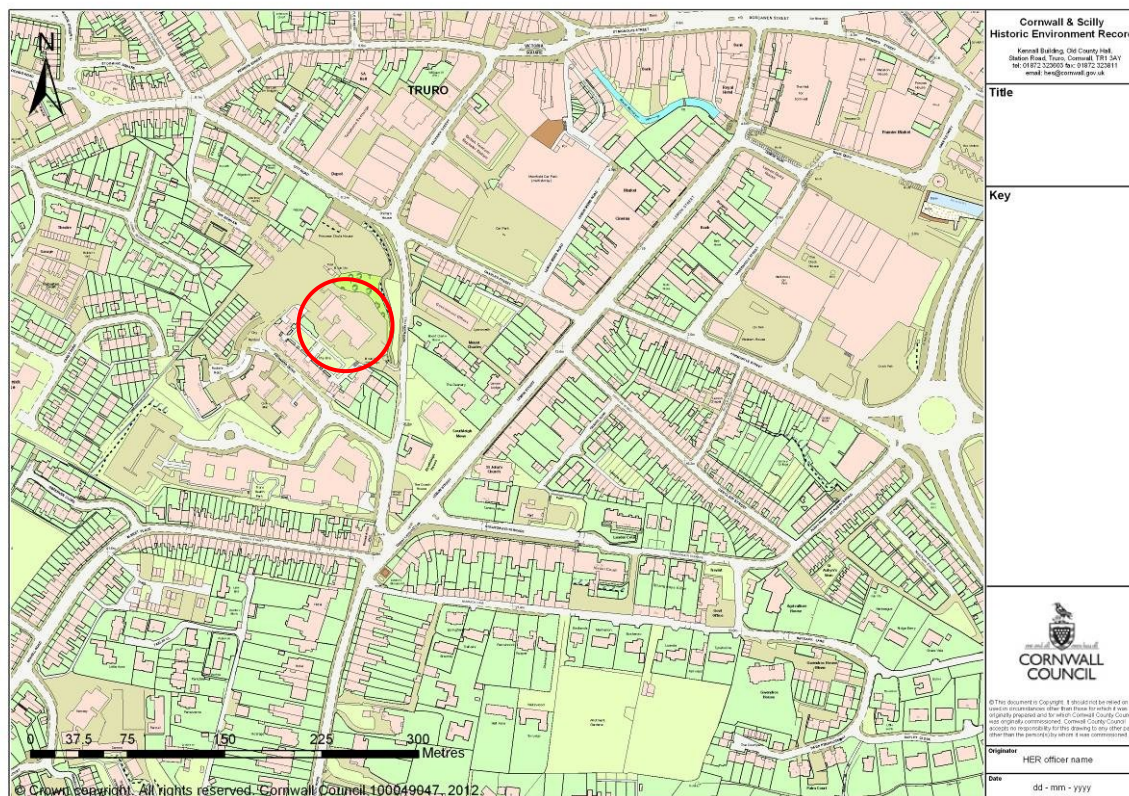


Fig 1 Location map



Fig 2 Truro in 1813 (from one inch OS Map)



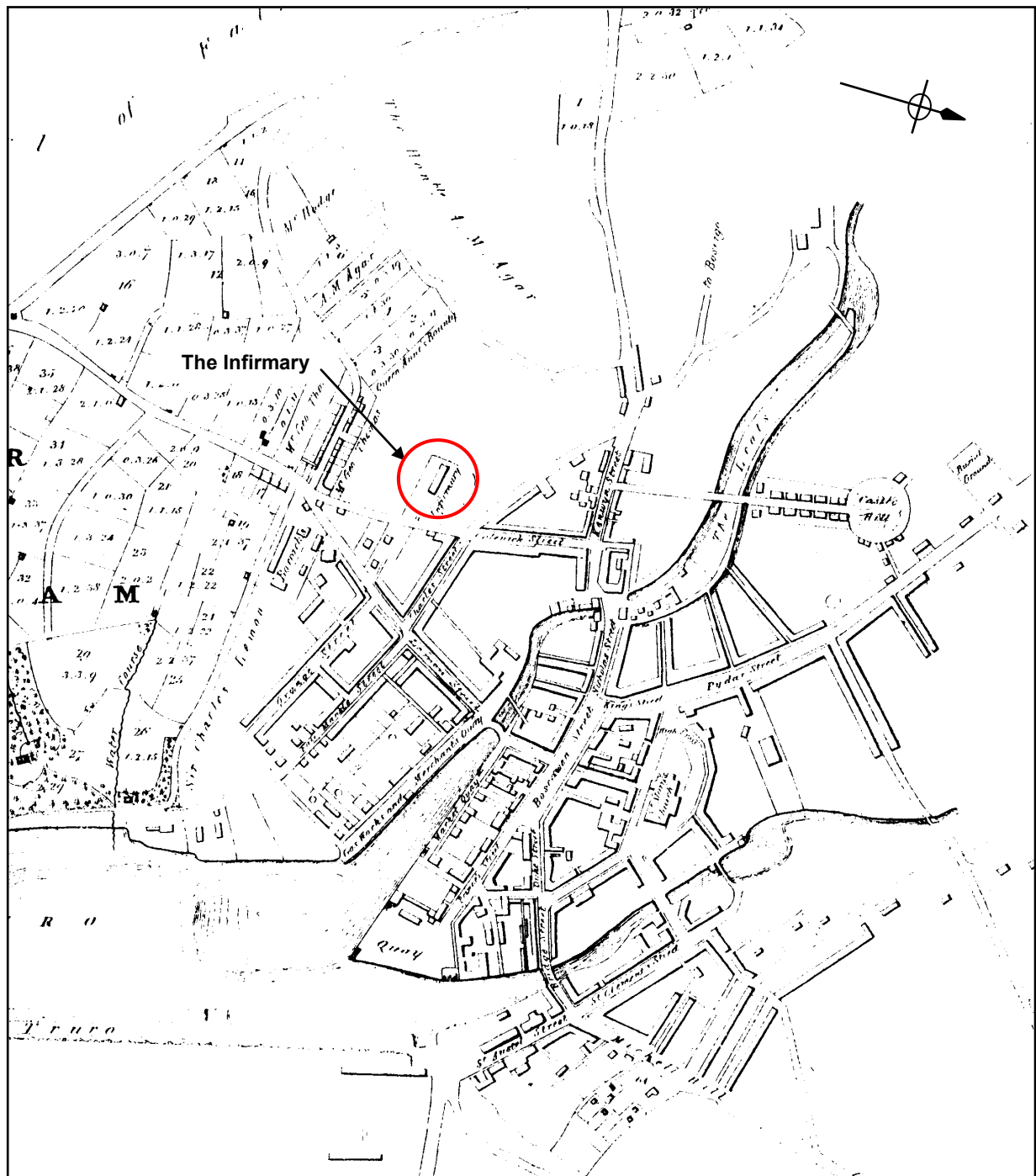


Fig 3 Plan of the Manor of Newham in 1831

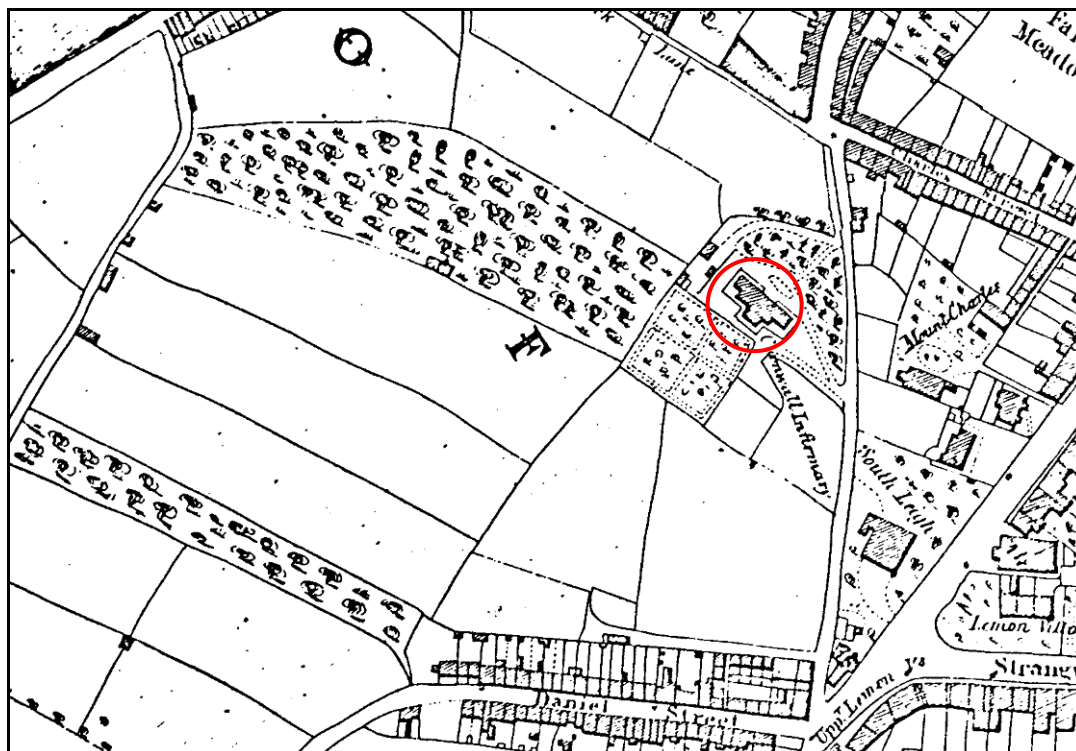


Fig 4 Richard Symons map of Truro, 1848 (from Truro Buildings Research Group, 1985)

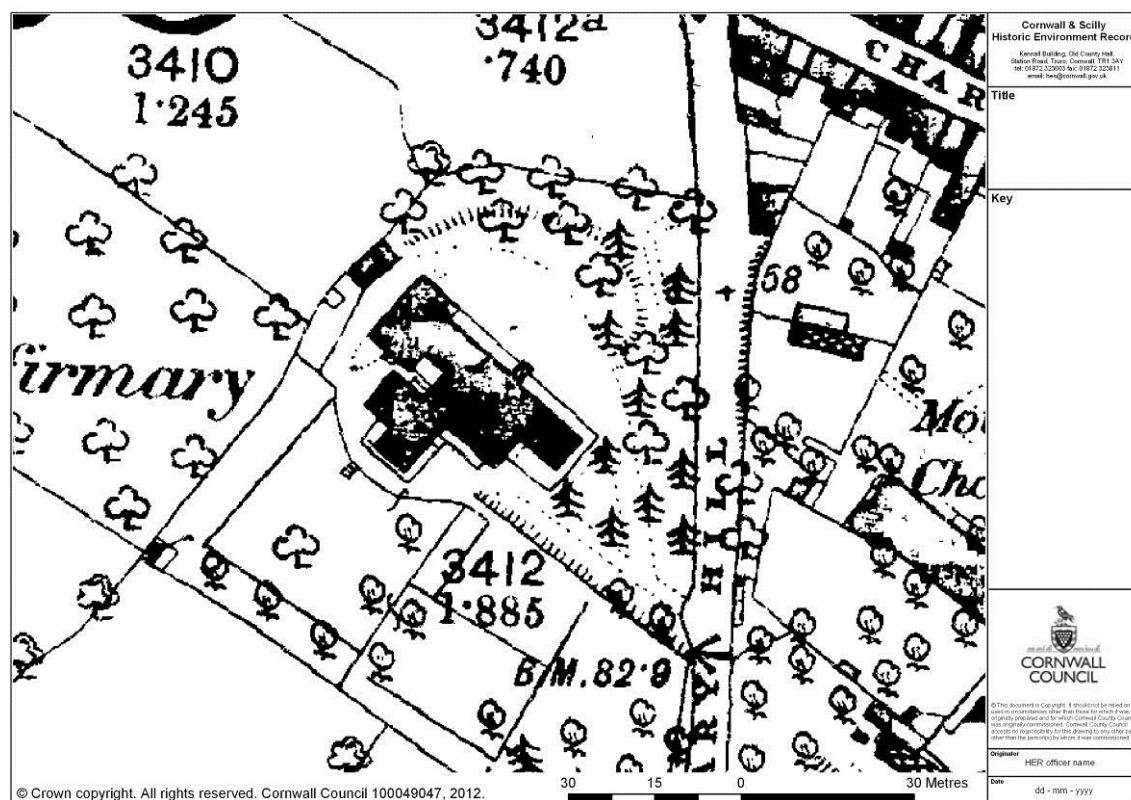


Fig 5 First Edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map, c1880



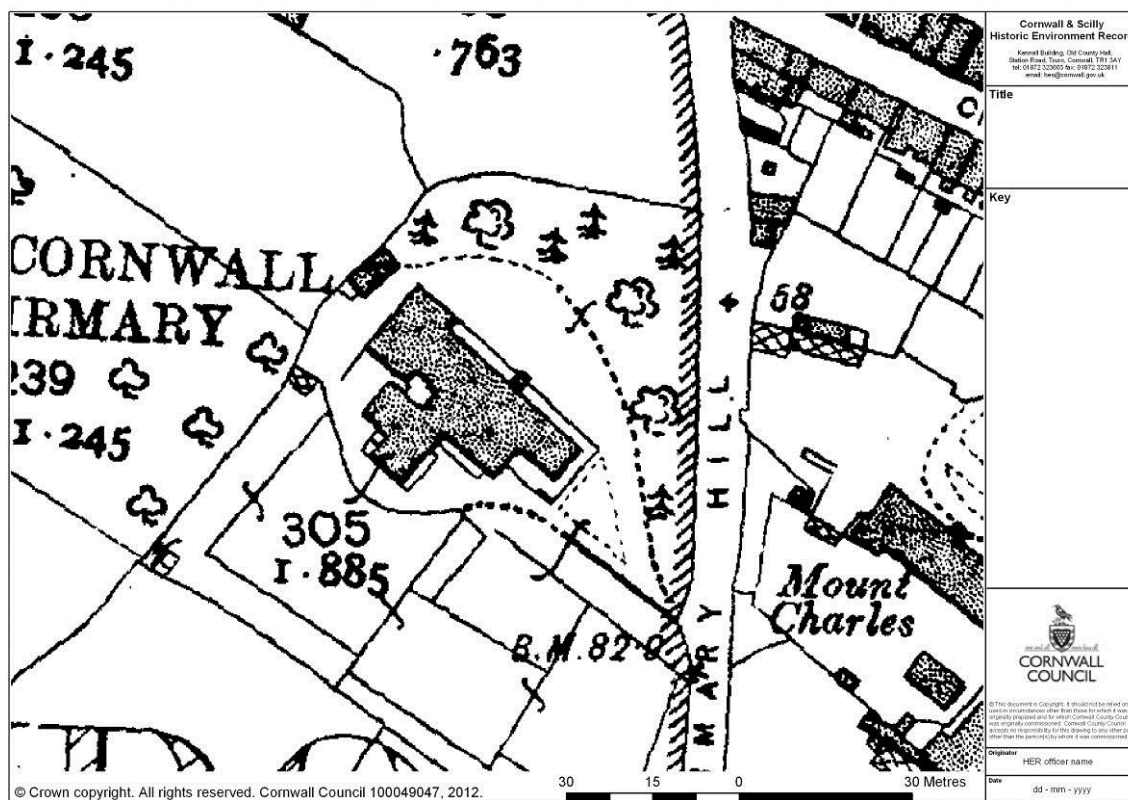


Fig 6 Second Edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map, c1907

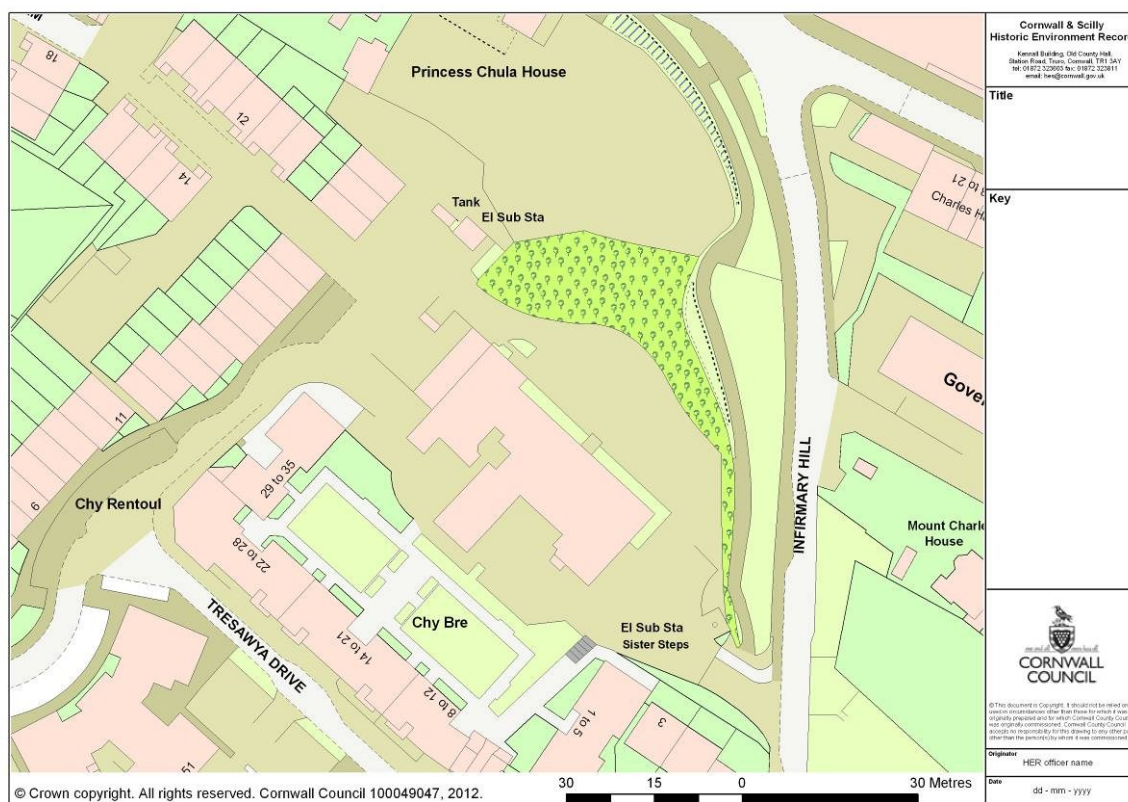


Fig 7 Ordnance Survey digital mapping showing the site and its environs (2009)

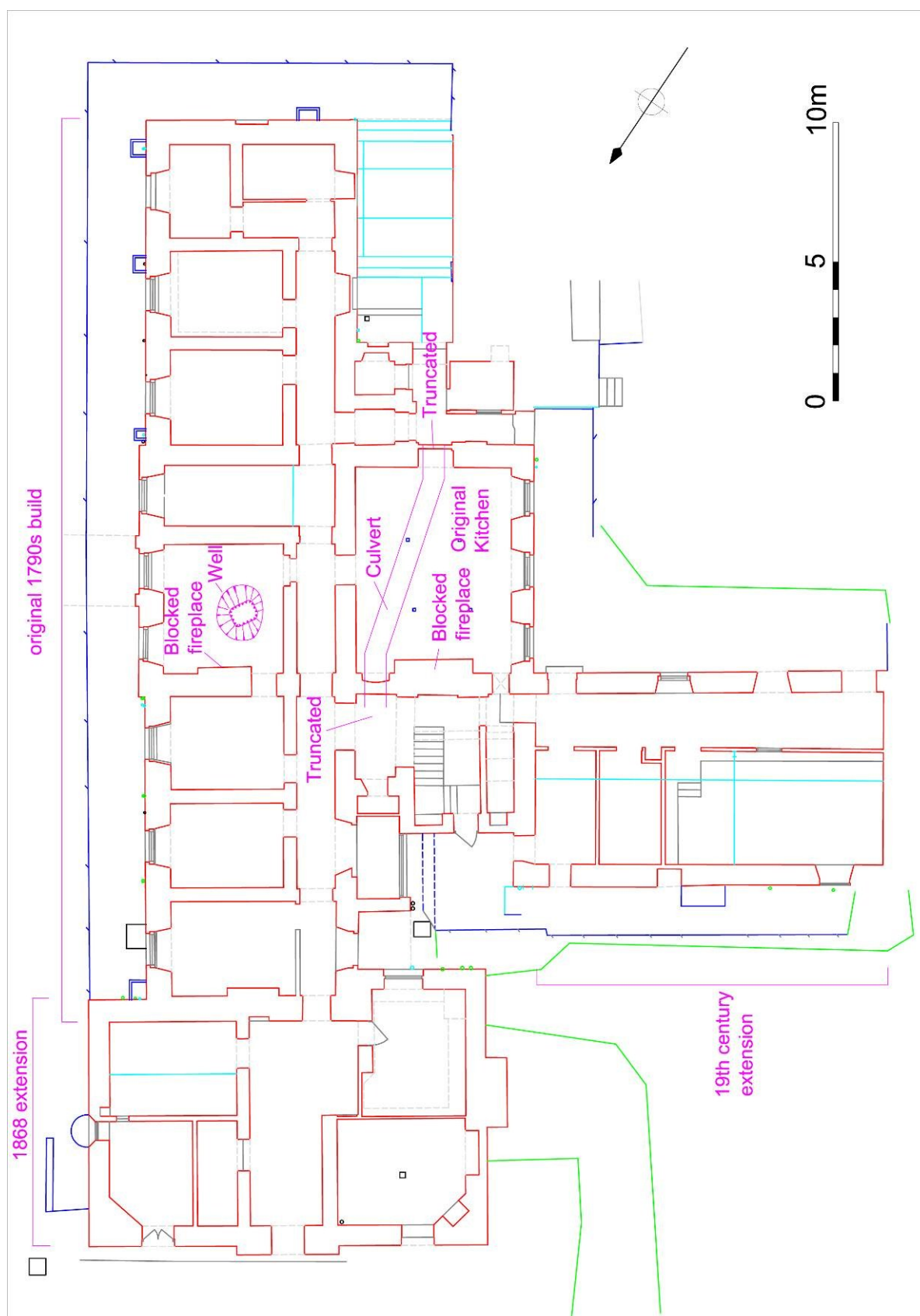


Fig 8 Plan of basement showing locations of the well and culvert (original drawing supplied by Linden Homes)





*Fig 9 View down the well*



*Fig 10 Brick culvert looking north-west*



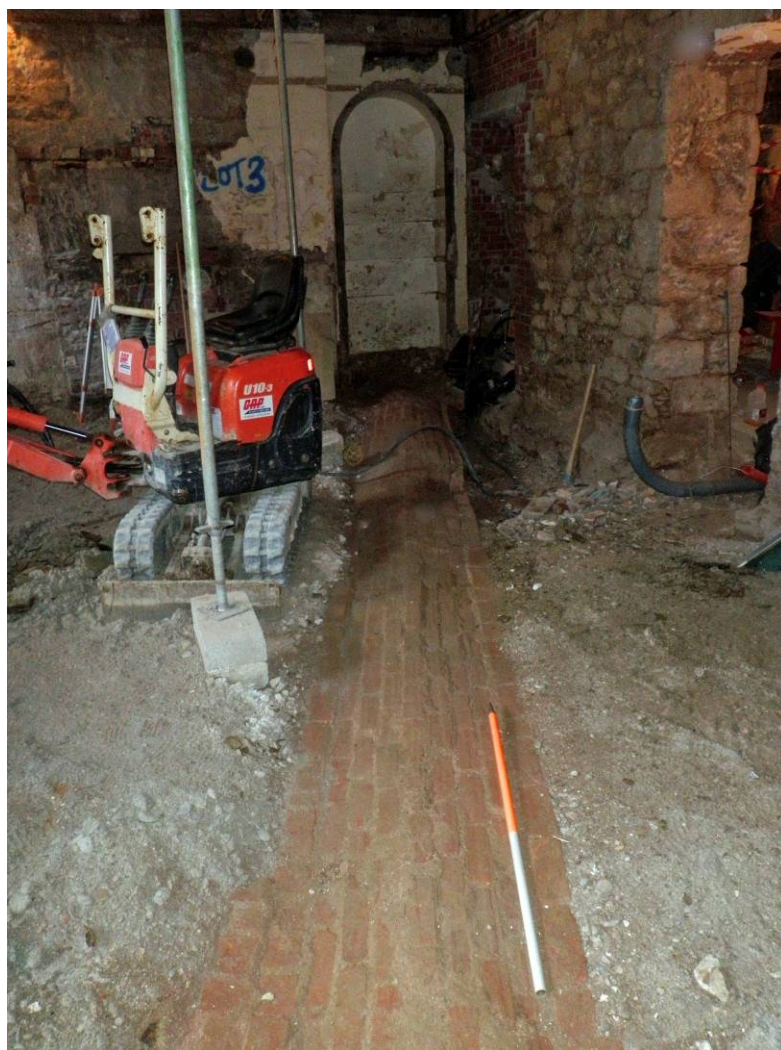


Fig 11 Brick culvert looking north

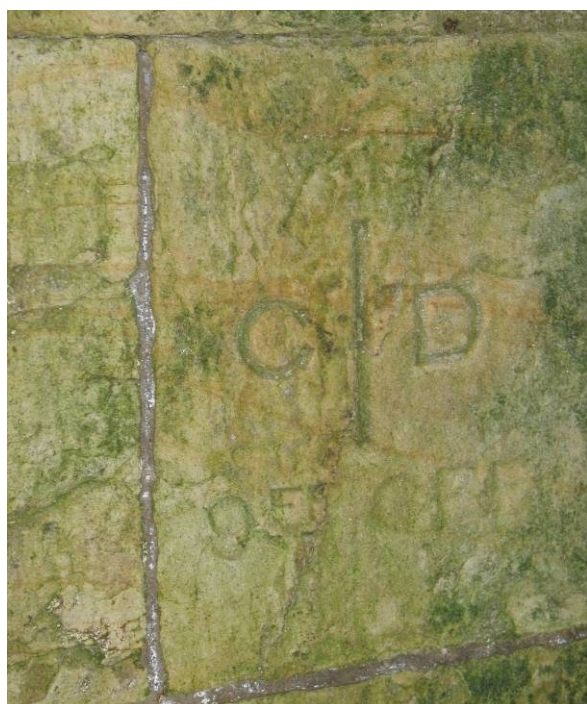


Fig 12 Incised stone on north-west wall of 1868 extension



*Fig 13 Reused granite pillars/lintels found covering the well. Wedge splitting marks indicate a pre 1800 date.*