

# HOLYWELL MUSIC ROOM, OXFORD

## BASIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It is proposed to enlarge the Holywell Music Room through the excavation beneath the existing music room and a small extension to the southeast. Wadham College has engaged John Moore Heritage Services to carry out a preliminary assessment of the known archaeology of the area in order to assess the potential impact of the proposed development.

### 2 MAP EVIDENCE

- 2.1 The most reliable of the early maps of Oxford is Loggan's map of 1675. Using later maps one can determine the position of the music room on this map in relation to Wadham College, *Aula Cervina* (later Hart Hall on Pieter van der Aa's map of 1729 and Magdalen Hall on Hoggar's map of 1850) and the cloisters of New College on Hoggar's map. The music room is located adjacent to, and on the west side of, the large building on the north frontage of Holywell Street on Loggan. This large house had a large west range extending back (northwards) from the frontage. This appears to have encroached onto the adjacent tenement (the site of the music room) and appears to be the same height as, and part of, the large house on the street frontage.
- 2.2 The house to the west of the large house i.e. occupying the tenement in the position of the music room was not as large/grand as that next door. This building also had a west range extending back with an outbuilding to the north and garden beyond. It also had an east range extending northwards and butted against the large west wing of the adjacent property. From Loggan and the other maps mentioned above it would appear that the music room is on the site of the less grand building and its wings. It is possible that it partly overlies the west part of the west wing of the large house. The music room is set back from the street frontage of Holywell Street. Loggan depicts Holywell Street as being relatively wide, wider than today. It is difficult to know whether the present buildings on both sides of Holywell Street have encroached onto the street or whether the less substantial houses depicted on Loggan on the south frontage have been rebuilt further northwards. If the present street frontage is similar on the north side to that in 1675 then the music room is to the rear of the part of the 1675 house fronting the street and may only be over the wings.
- 2.3 Agas' map of 1578 shows the site of the music room as an orchard within part of the former site of Augustinian Friars. Merian's map of c. 1650 is more schematic but does show the small house next to the large house but no rear wings are shown. The 1729 map of Pieter van der Aa is not as clear as Loggan but appears

to have the same arrangement of buildings. Hoggar's map of 1850 shows the music room with gardens to the rear.

- 2.4 The VCH states that there were medieval houses and tenements in Holwell Street (1979, IV, 272) on the evidence of unpublished muniments of Merton College. Anthony Wood writing in 1660s records a series of what he describes as medieval 'halls' along the north side of the street and his plan positions Persover Hall in the general area of the large house (Wood's History of the City of Oxford, A Clark Ed OHS XV, 1899, I, 383-5).
- 2.5 Archaeological investigation in the area is relatively limited. An evaluation at Manchester College (OAU, Manchester College, Oxford. Archaeological Assessment Report) found evidence of a medieval back boundary between a burgage plot on the Holywell frontage and arable strips of open fields to the rear. A wall appeared to replace a bank. The top of the archaeology was *c.* 1m below present ground surface. Approximately 40m to the west of the music room a watching brief found 17<sup>th</sup> century pottery and foundations of the original Wadham College buildings along with a brick tunnel, all overlying an old gravel pit. This may mean that medieval remains in the area of the music room may have been quarried away.
- 2.6 Archaeological excavations further east along Holwell Street and between that and Jowett Walk found medieval buildings and pits along with post-medieval pits and a ditch. The top of the archaeology was *c.* 1.1 – 1.2m below present ground level. A Bronze Age bronze implement was found at Manchester College approximately 100m to the east of the music room (County Sites and Monuments Record PRN 3518). Other excavations at Jowett Walk found a post-medieval garden along with a possible prehistoric ditch.

### **3 SIGNIFICANCE**

- 3.1 The large building depicted on Loggan on the adjacent property is important and may be the development of an earlier medieval building of note. The lesser building thought to be on the site of the music room is of lesser importance. However any remains of it that would be affected by the development proposals are of local importance and would need to be archaeologically excavated and recorded. Any medieval buildings on the site that similarly would be impacted on are of importance. Little is known of the type of building and status of the medieval occupation of this part of Oxford outside of the City wall.

### **4 PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 There is usually a requirement for an archaeological evaluation to be carried out prior to determination of such a planning application. In this case the music room cannot be evaluated by intrusive means while the room is in use. Non-intrusive

means would not be effective. A trench in the position of the proposed extension may be effective in determining the top level, depth and date of surviving archaeological remains depending on whether any, or how many services, are present. Such an evaluation should be able to determine whether the area has been quarried, as seen 40m to the west and whether medieval remains survive.

John Moore Heritage Services  
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