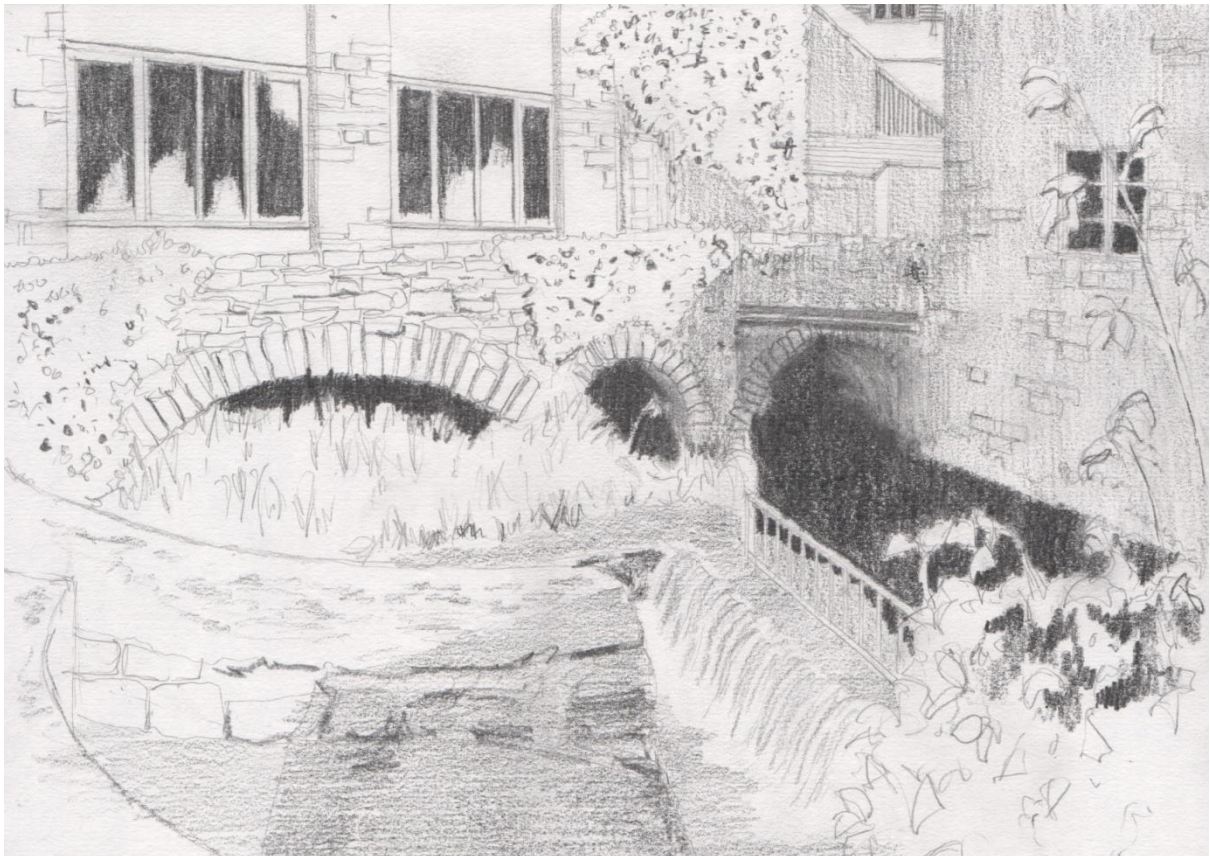


# DULVERTON LEAT'S MYSTERY CULVERT

Visitors to the lower end of Dulverton Leat (behind Dulverton Laundry) will see a partially buried, arched culvert exit which is a duplicate in building materials and size to the main culvert used by the leat as it flows under the right hand side of the Laundry building (this is partially masked by a later 'squared off' front built to make a larger concrete area for parking alongside the laundry, it is however still visible if you look closely).

Previously hidden by vegetation, the mystery culvert is now clearly visible to the left of the leat culvert and a central, smaller, bypass channel between the two main channels. The identical building style indicates that all three culverts were built at the same time and very probably for earlier buildings on the site.



**Illustration by Roger Hammond, Artist in Residence Dulverton Weir & Leat.**

Research by Peter Romain, Archaeology Lead Trustee of Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust, reveals that from the 1820 map, on the site of the current laundry, there was a Fulling Mill called Tangier Mill with two waterwheels each driven by a separate leat channel. However, by 1826, Tangier Mill had been demolished and a new Silk Mill (now the Laundry) had been built on the same footprint. The silk mill had only one waterwheel which would explain why one of the channels became redundant.

The Trust believes that this mystery culvert is the last remaining visible evidence of Tangier Mill. Having established that there were two leat channels but only a single channel upstream at Town Mills, the question is, where did the leat split into two?

The Trust's initial hypothesis was that the leat split somewhere under Holland House. The shape of Holland house being narrower at the front (High Street elevation) than at the rear, seemed to indicate the possibility of Holland House's shape being dictated by the need to straddle one leat at the front and then two at the rear of the building.

The Trust wanted to carry out more research, but it's a big job to dig out the mystery culvert from the laundry end, so the easiest thing was to ask experienced divers to enter the leat and follow its course for the 50 metres under the road and Holland House to see what they could find. But with just two feet of headroom and running water, this was a formidable task.

.....Step forward Avon & Somerset Police Underwater Search Unit, who regularly come to Dulverton to train and were delighted to find a suitable location to practise 'Confined Space Techniques'.....



"We were delighted to be able to help the Trust" said Pc Dave Allen of the Underwater Search Unit "Dulverton Leat provides an ideal environment, it was an excellent training opportunity for the team, though we were not able to find any evidence of the leat dividing into two we were able to provide the Trust with photographs and a film taken inside the culvert".

Such is the nature of archaeology, one starts with a hypothesis which is sometimes disproved. The leat clearly does divide, but not where the Trust had thought.

Thanks to the Avon & Somerset Police Underwater Search Unit, the Trust can now go on to focus on the area in front of Holland House for the answer. We know that Holland House was built in about 1770, some 50 years before Tangier Mill was knocked down. From the 1820 map, we can see that Leat Bridge was at that time much narrower, allowing the leat to come out from Leat Bridge into the open air before passing under Holland House. Our hypothesis is now that the leat divided in the open air between the Leat Bridge and Holland house. From the Tithe Map of 1838, we can see that the front elevation of Holland House was subsequently extended outwards towards Leat Bridge (the original gable end complete with window is still visible in the loft area of Holland House). The second leat becoming redundant may have made this extension possible.

This is a continuing part of a fascinating project and the Trust looks forward to sharing more of its research in the future..

More details of our research can be found in Dulverton Library or in the Academic Resources Section of our website at [www.dulvertonweir.org.uk](http://www.dulvertonweir.org.uk). Film provided by Avon & Somerset Police can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpR2gu2sSpo> or on our website.