ABSOLUTE ARCHAEOLOGY 2022

An Interim Report for Archaeological test pitting carried out within the confines of Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire



The East facing side of Lacock Abbey looking across 'Home Field'

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On behalf of the National Trust

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Summary

Absolute Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust at Lacock to carry out a series of test pitting within the precincts of Lacock Abbey. The thirty one test pits measuring 0.3m cubed were selected to be placed in vulnerable (intercept strikes) places adjacent to exterior main walls in the confines of the Abbey prior to the installations of lightning conductor pads and rods. Initially nine test pits were selected out of the thirty one which were then excavated over a three day period with the results forwarded on to Wiltshire Council for scrutiny. The area of investigations was centred (Courtyard Centre) at grid reference ST 91945.68444. The trial pitting/evaluation was carried out from Tuesday the 3rd May through to Thursday the 5th May 2022. The majority of the nine test pits were cut into relatively modern topsoil's and border drainage material (scalpings). Re-used dressed stone was found and incorporated into the foundations of the Cloister in test pit nine and probably originating from a mullion window.

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The overall plan of the Abbey showing the positions of the nine earthing pits

Fig 1

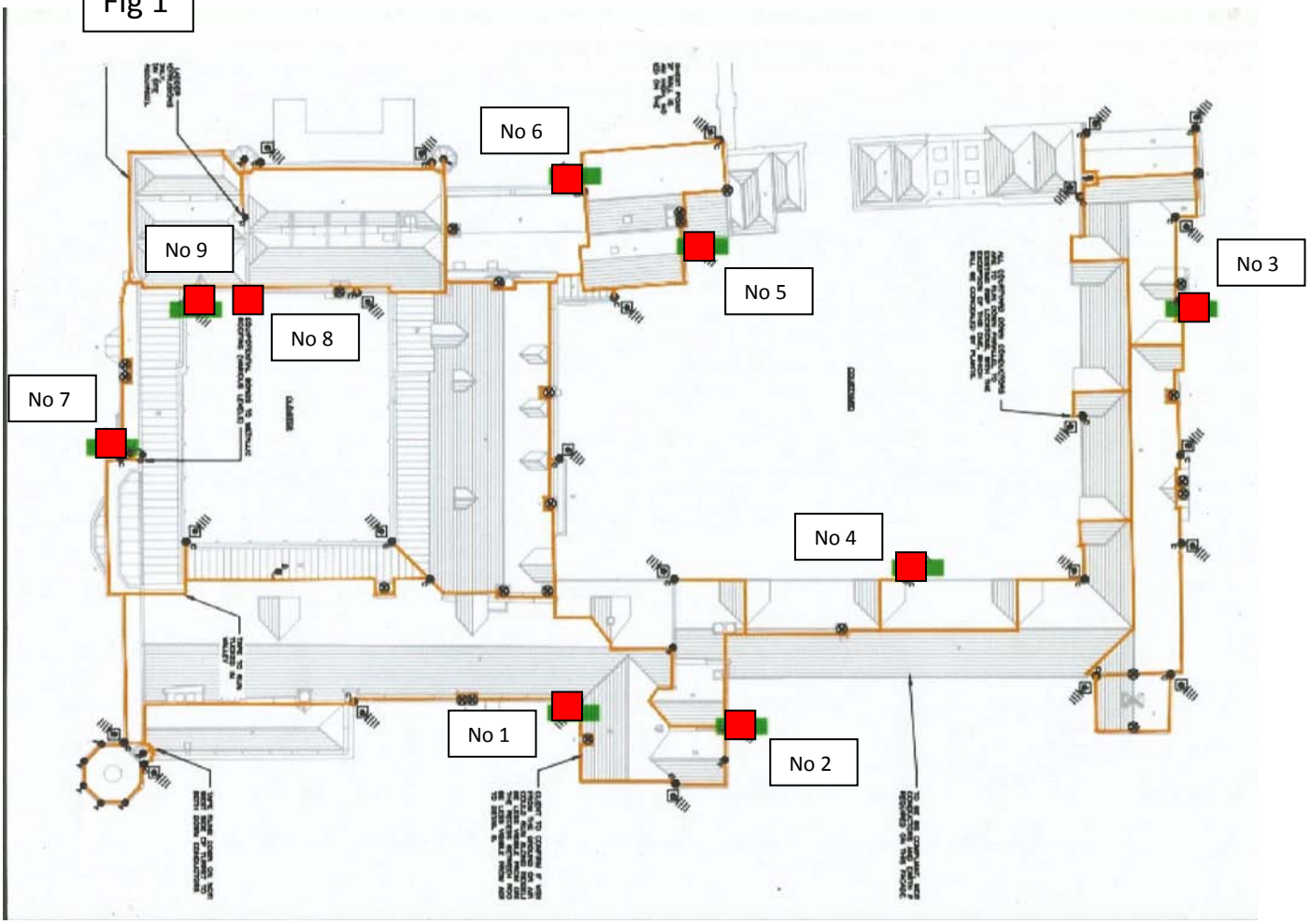
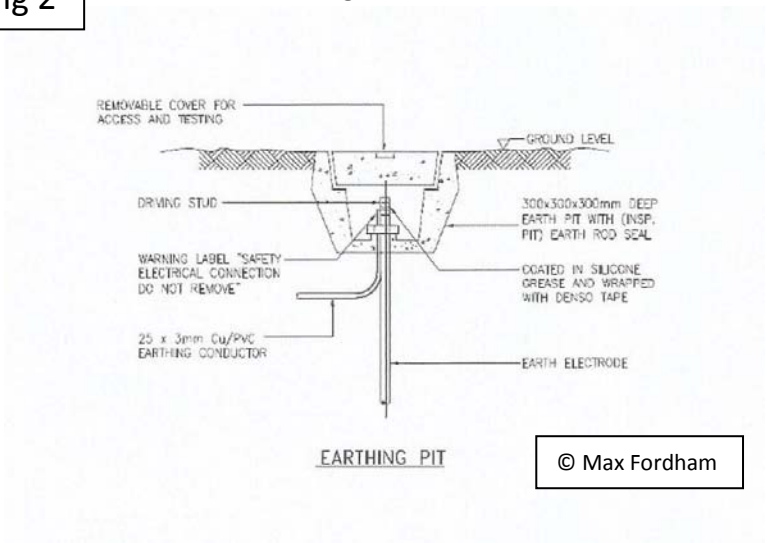


Fig 2 The Earthing Pit Mechanism



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1. INTRODUCTION

Lacock Abbey was founded by Ela, Countess of Salisbury in 1232 as a Nunnery for Augustinian canonesses and as a memorial to her late husband, William Longaspee (Watling 1982). The Abbey situated approximately 150 metres west of the River Avon, has over the years seen changes notably the razing in the mid 16th century of the Abbey Church once situated in the area of the Southern Abbey lawns. This can be attributed to William Sharrington who purchased the Abbey from the Crown in 1539. The Abbey did sustain some damage during the dissolution of the Monasteries but not nearly as badly as most that were completely destroyed across the country. From this period in time the Abbey resorted to a country residence up until 1946 when the National Trust purchased the property and grounds from Miss Matilda Talbot. There appeared up to 2016 be no evidence historically or archaeologically of any structures or activity on the site originally known as 'Snaylesmede' (meadow where snails abound) prior to the founding of the Abbey in 1232. The excavations however carried out prior to the installation of a Xmas tree holder found possible evidence of a Roman wall with pitched stone foundations (Martin 2017, Figs 3-5)

This document sets out the results of archaeological test pitting/evaluation (hereafter referred to as the Project Site) within the confines of Lacock Abbey The work was commissioned by the National Trust and carried out by Absolute Archaeology between Tuesday the 3rd May and Thursday the 5th May 2022.

The programme of work comprised hand excavations of selected test pits within the confines of Lacock Abbey. The project consisted of excavating nine test pits measuring 0.3 metres cubed to accommodate earthing pit mechanisms.

2. THE PROJECT SITE

The Project Site is located 150 metres to the west of the River Avon and east of Lacock village, in an area of high archaeological potential.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The Project Site lies 150 metres to the west of the River Avon and east of Lacock village at circa 41m aOD and within the 16th Century 'Tudor Courtyard.' The area is defined geologically as Quaternary First River Terrace Deposits (Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel) in turn overlaying Middle/Upper Jurassic Kellaways Formation (BGS Sheet 265).

4. RESULTS

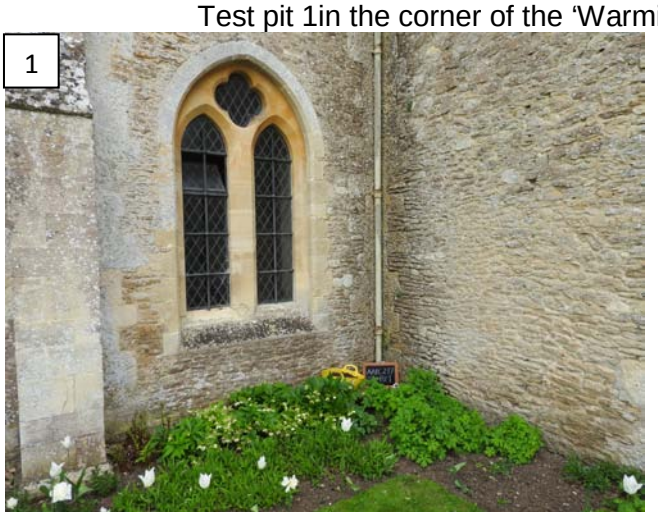
The results of the initial test pitting/evaluation (nine test pits) carried out between 3rd May and 5th May 2022 prior to the installation of thirty one lightning conductor earthing pits was in the main a positive result in that no archaeological features or layers will be disturbed during the actual installation of the 0.3m earthing pit mechanism (see Fig 2). The nine test pits were generally dug in the areas shown on the original plan submitted by Max Fordham (see Fig 1). Most of the nine test pits were dug as close as possible to the main walls and within the confines of shrubbery, flower borders and lawn. Of note was a possible re-used mullion acting as part of the Cloisters foundation western wall, this was found in Test pit 9 (see Photo 18). Inserting the lightning box mechanism in the area of Test pit 6 might have complications in that there could possibly be some sort of drainage system below the encountered layer of shingle/aggregate deposit plus the mechanism would be unstable within the loose aggregate.

4.1. TEST PIT 1. Grid Ref No. ST 91970 68422.

Located in the corner of the 'Warming Room'/ East annexe outer wall and adjacent to a roof water drain and metal pipe. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of humic calcareous border topsoil (100) residing above a subsoil (101). Only residual finds of post- medieval broken slate and tile were found. The positioning of the test pit (20cm east of drain surround) was positive ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 1in the corner of the 'Warming Room' and Eastern entrance

1



2



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.2. TEST PIT 2. Grid Ref No ST 91972 68434.

Located in the along the North facing wall of the Eastern annexe and next to a drain and a metal downpipe. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of humic border topsoil (200) residing above a clay subsoil (201). Only residual finds of post- medieval broken slate and tile were found. The positioning of the test pit (20cm to the east of the drain surround) was positive ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 2 next to the metal downpipe and drain and adjacent to the North facing wall

3



4



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.3. TEST PIT 3. Grid Ref No ST 91940 68474. 41.28m aOD

Located in the along the North facing wall and next to a drain and a metal downpipe. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of humic border topsoil (300) residing above a subsoil (301). Only residual finds of post- medieval broken glass, slate and tile were found. The positioning of the test pit was positive (25cm to the west of the drain surround) ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 3 next to the metal downpipe and drain and adjacent to the North facing wall

5



Measures 3 x 0.3m

6



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.4. TEST PIT 4. Grid Ref No ST 91961 68448. 40.68m aOD

Located in the along the West facing wall in the Courtyard and next to a drain and a metal downpipe. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through a humic topsoil (400). Only residual finds of post-medieval tile were found. The positioning of the test pit was positive (20cm to the north of the drain surround) ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 4 next to the metal downpipe and drain and adjacent to the West facing wall

7



8



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.5. TEST PIT 5. Grid Ref No ST 91933 68435. 40.78m aOD

Located in the along the West facing wall in the Courtyard and next to a double drain and a metal downpipe. Two test holes were excavated only to find modern plastic drain pipes in both test pits. The plastic pipes continued through the border. A new positioning (20 cm from drain surround and 20cm East of the wall) was found for accommodating the lightning box mechanism, North and adjacent to the drain and border surround. No features or finds were found within the buried topsoil (503).

Test pit 5 showing the repositioned test pit. The two other test pits were deemed unsuitable

9



10



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.6. TEST PIT 6. Grid Ref No ST 91925 68426. 41.90m aOD

Located along the West facing wall and next to the outer kitchen lesene/butress. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through a deep deposit of drainage shingle (601). This was not bottomed at 0.5m. The positioning of the test pit would have to be considered for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 6 cut through 0.3m of shingle/aggregate next to the outer kitchen .

11



12



Measures 2 x 0.3m

4.7. TEST PIT 7. Grid Ref No ST 91946 68385.

Located in the corner of the South outer 'Cloister' wall. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.28m of humic border topsoil (700) residing above a subsoil (701). Only residual finds of post-medieval broken CBM were found. The positioning of the test pit was positive ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 7 in the corner of the outer 'Cloister' wall and to the right of the main 'Cloister' entrance

13



Measures 3 x 0.3m

14



Measures 2 x 0.3m

4.8. TEST PIT 8. Grid Ref No ST 91934 68396.

Located in the along the West facing wall in the Courtyard and next to a drain and a lead downpipe. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.25m of humic border topsoil (800) residing above a natural clay (801). Only residual finds of post- medieval slate and tile were found. The positioning of the test pit (20 cm to the south of the drain surround and 20cm to the east of the Cloister wall) was positive ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 8 next to the lead downpipe and drain. Located next to the East facing wall in the 'Cloister'

15



16



Measures 3 x 0.3m

4.9. TEST PIT 9. Grid Ref No ST 91933 68394.

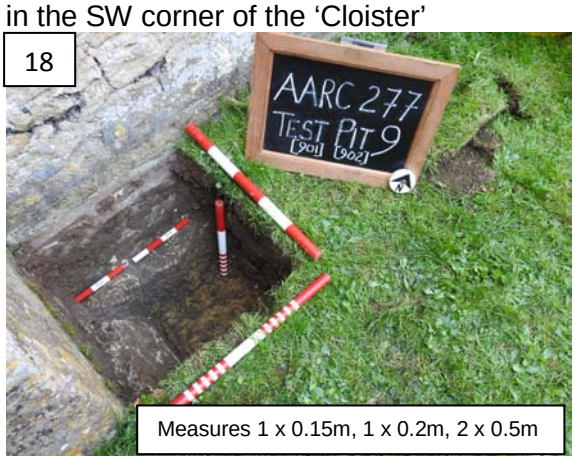
Located in the SW corner of the Cloister and next to the chimney stack. A 0.5m x 0.5m test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of humic turfline/ topsoil (900) residing above natural clay (901)coming in at 0.36m. Only residual finds of post- medieval broken glass and tile were found. The stack foundation [902] coursing was made up of a dressed piece of possible mullion window. The positioning of the test pit was positive (20cm out from both foundations) ready for accommodating the lightning box mechanism.

Test pit 9 next to the corner stack. Located in the SW corner of the 'Cloister'

17



18



Measures 1 x 0.15m, 1 x 0.2m, 2 x 0.5m

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the test pitting provided more evidence of the geology of the area. Several of the test pits revealed subsoils (Test pits 1, 2 and 3) and natural clay (Test pits 8 and 9) coming in at circa 0.3m from the surface. This in itself is important in understanding the sequence of archaeological layers found during previous work, especially in the main Courtyard. A more detailed account of this will be reported during the next phase of work. The evidence so far provides more evidence of archaeological features in the form of stratigraphical layers (Martin, 2017,Figs 3-5; Martin, 2019, 4-6) which seem to occur across large areas of the 'Tudor Courtyard' and beneath the present modern surface including the topsoil's found in a number of the test pits.

6. REFERENCES

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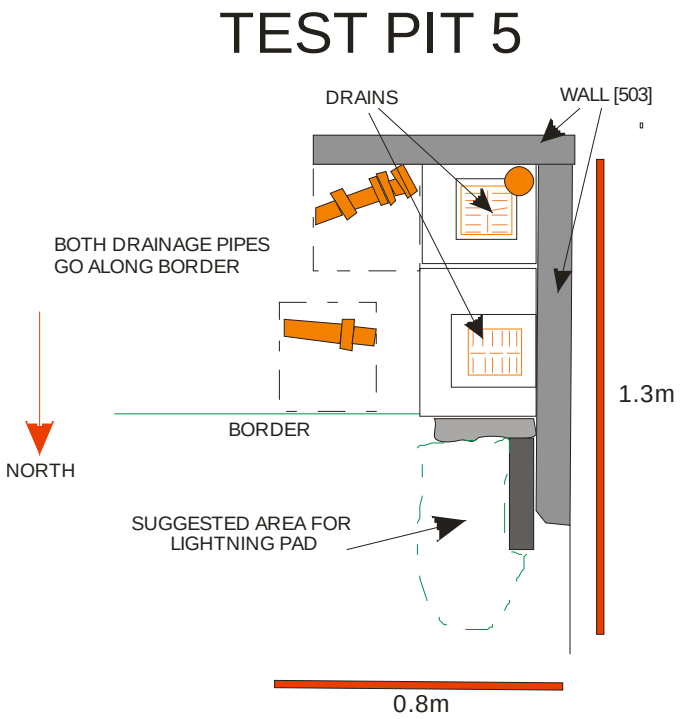
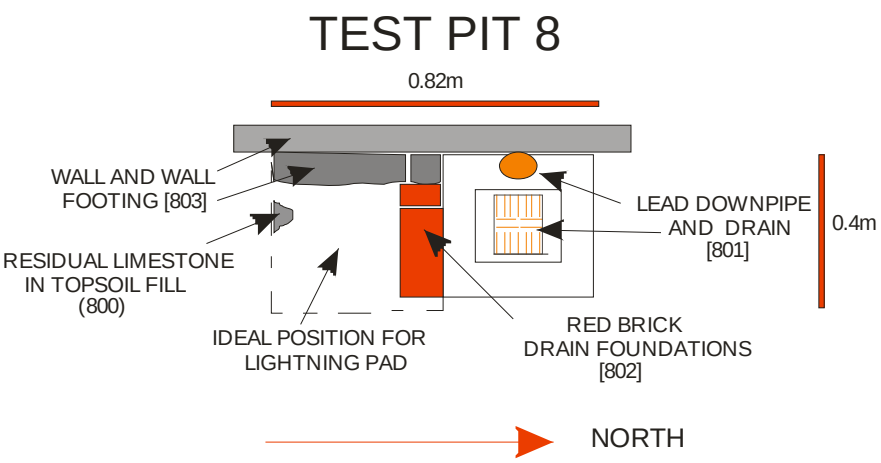
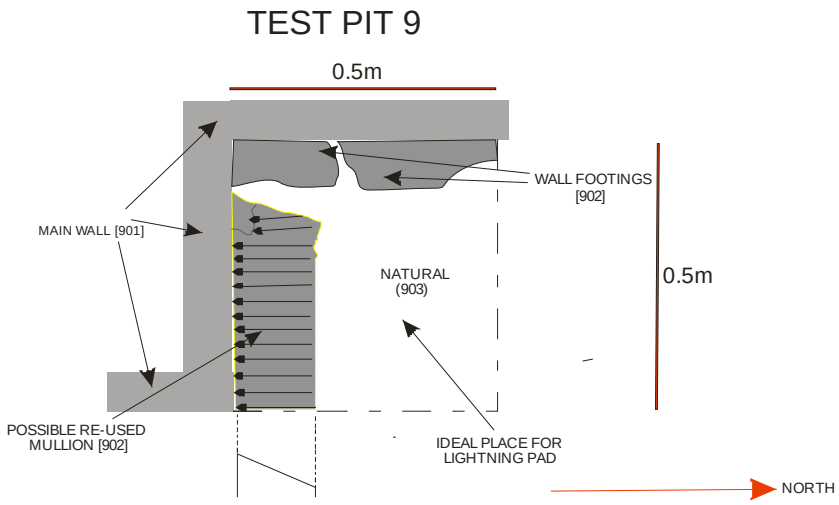
APPENDICES


TEST PIT 5
DRAINS
WALL [503]
BOTH DRAINAGE PIPES
GO ALONG BORDER
1.3m
BORDER
NORTH
SUGGESTED AREA FOR
LIGHTNING PAD
0.8m


TEST PIT 8
0.82m
WALL AND WALL
FOOTING [803]
RESIDUAL LIMESTONE
IN TOPSOIL FILL
(800)
IDEAL POSITION FOR
LIGHTNING PAD
LEAD DOWNPIPE
AND DRAIN
[801]
0.4m
RED BRICK
DRAIN FOUNDATIONS
[802]
NORTH


TEST PIT 9
0.5m
WALL FOOTINGS
[902]
MAIN WALL [901]
NATURAL
(903)
0.5m
POSSIBLE RE-USED
MULLION [902]
IDEAL PLACE FOR
LIGHTNING PAD
NORTH