

ABSOLUTE ARCHAEOLOGY 2025

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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Prepared by Paul Martin BSc (Hons)

Signed by



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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. A further 20 test pits were excavated leaving 2 (No's 27 and 29) to be excavated during the installations. The area of investigations was centred (Courtyard Centre) at grid reference ST 91945.68444. The test pitting/evaluation was carried out from Tuesday the 3rd May through to Thursday the 5th May 2022 and July/November 2025. The majority of the twenty 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. Listed Building Consent (LBC) was approved on the 12th September 2023 after submission of the Written Scheme of Investigation.

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Google Earth aerial view of Lacock Village, Lacock Abbey and the River Avon



The overall plan of the Abbey showing the positions of the thirty one earthing pits

Fig 2

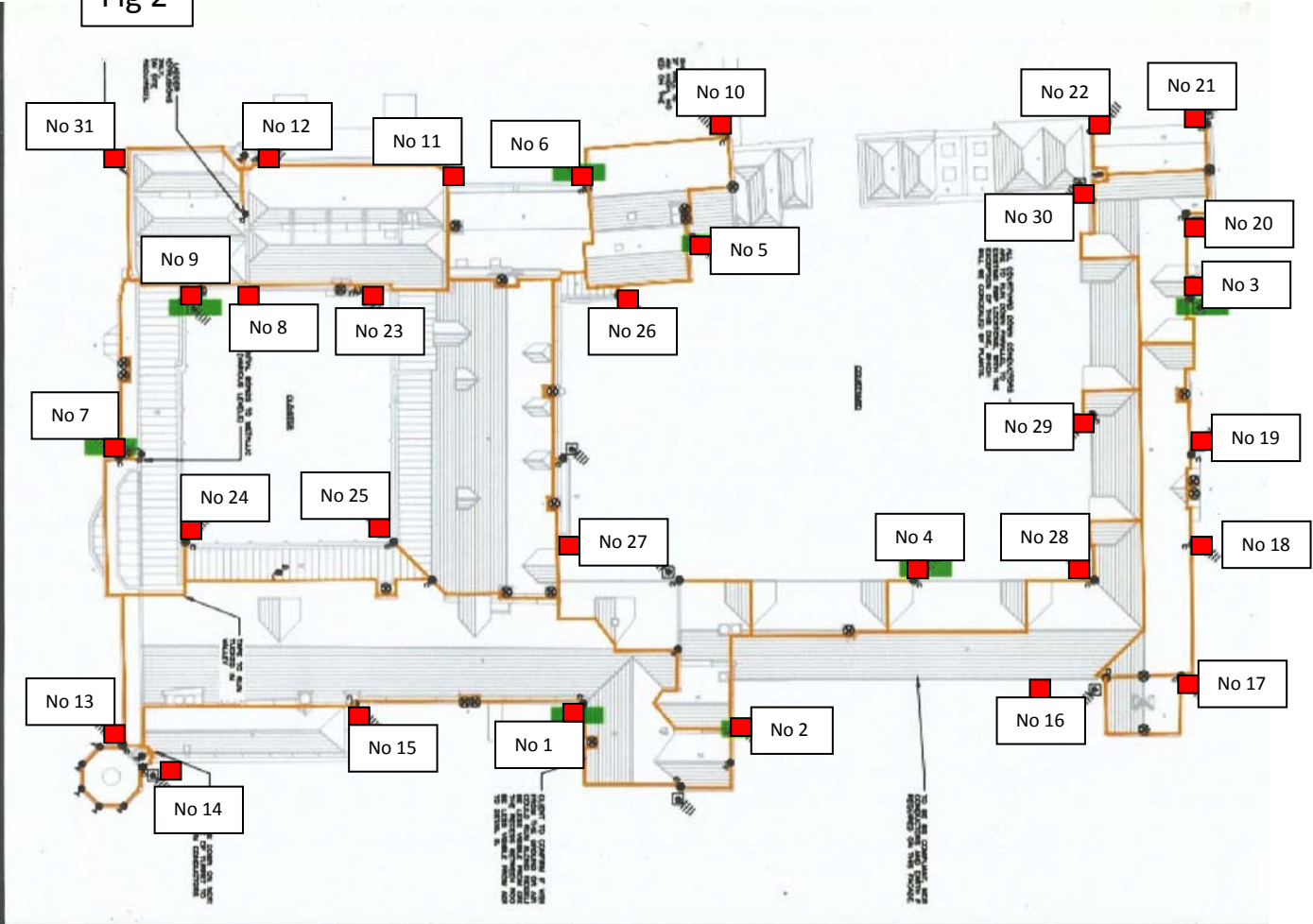
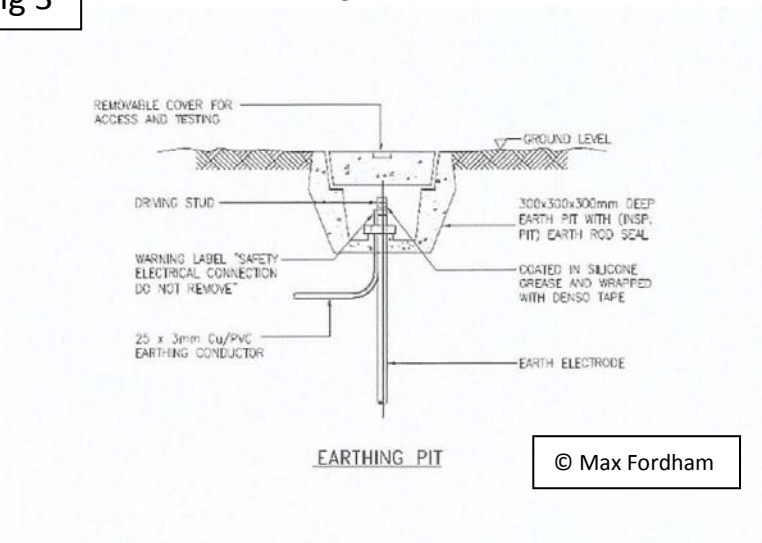


Fig 3

The Earthing Pit Mechanism



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 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), suggesting earthworks were visible in the 13th century when Ela had her supposed/legendary vision for a Nunnery on the present site, rather than a flat open meadow made up of alluvial clays.

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 during July 2025 and November 2025.

The programme of work comprised hand excavations of selected test pits within the confines of Lacock Abbey. The project consisted of excavating twenty nine test pits measuring 0.3 metres cubed to accommodate earthing pit mechanisms. Test pits 27 and 29 will require a watching brief during the earthing pit mechanism installation.

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 test pitting/evaluation (29 test pits) carried out between May 2022 and November 2025 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 initial twenty nine test pits excavated were generally dug in the areas shown on the original plan submitted by Max Fordham (see Fig 1). Most of the twenty nine test pits were dug as close as possible to the main walls and within the confines of shrubbery, flower borders and lawns. 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 earthing pit mechanism in the area of Test pits 6 and 10 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. Two test pits (27 and 29) will require a watching brief during the installation of the earthing pit mechanisms.

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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



Measures 3 x 0.3m



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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



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 earthing pit 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



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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



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 natural alluvial clay (701). Only residual finds of post- medieval broken CBM were found. The positioning of the test pit was positive ready for accommodating the earthing pit mechanism.

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



Measures 3 x 0.3m



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 earthing pit mechanism.

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

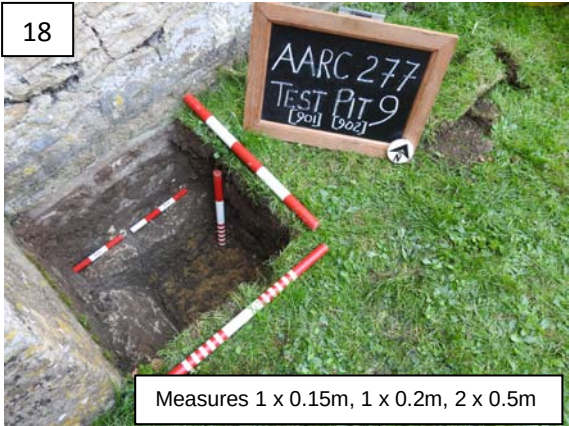


Measures 3 x 0.3m

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 (903)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 earthing pit mechanism.

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



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

4.10. TEST PIT 10. Grid Ref No ST 91923 68436.

Located in the NW corner of the outer courtyard building. A 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of drainage gravel/scalping (1000) adjacent to the west facing wall. No finds. Would be difficult to place the earthing mechanism in such loose gravel/scalping.

Test Pit 10 showing the 0.3m cubed hole cut through drainage gravel/scalping, then after backfill



Measures 2 x 0.3m



4.11. TEST PIT 11. Grid Ref No ST 91923 68414.

Located in the SW corner of the outer 'Kitchen' wall and the NW corner of the 'Hallover' wall and central to the lancet window. A 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.2m of topsoil (1100) and through 0.1m of natural clay. No finds. The test pit needs to be placed 0.3 metres to the left of the main drain and central to the lancet window to accommodate the earthing mechanism.

Test Pit 11 showing the 0.3m cubed hole cut through topsoil (1100) and natural clay (1101)



Measures 2 x 0.3m



4.12. TEST PIT 12. Grid Ref No ST 91921 68400.

Located in the SW corner of the Outer Parlour' wall. A mature 'Fig' tree had to be pruned back to gain access to the area required. Due to a mass of roots it was decided to excavate test pit twelve 0.6 metres to the west of the west facing wall. A 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated down through 0.3m of topsoil (1200). The foundation stone [1201] to the angular alcove north facing wall would need to be avoided to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism. The fig tree in question due to its age and positioning could be removed after consultation with the Head Gardener

Test Pit 12 showing the 0.3m cubed hole cut through topsoil (1200) and the foundation stone [1201] and the fig tree within the alcove.



Measures 2 x 0.3m

Test Pit 12 located to the right of the steps.



4.13. TEST PIT 13. Grid Ref No ST 91968 68382.

Located in the outer south corner of the ‘Church Sacristy’ filled in doorway and ‘Sharington ‘Tower’ doorway. Excavated through 0.28m-0.3m of topsoil. Foundation stones [1301] were located at 0.2m depth from the surface. The earthing pit mechanism will have to be moved slightly to avoid the foundations.

Test Pit 13 showing Test Pit 13 located in the corner of the filled in doorway and the corner of the ‘Sharington Tower’ doorway



Measures 2 x 0.3m

4.14. TEST PIT 14. Grid Ref No ST 91972 68387.

Located on the outer east facing wall of the ‘Chapel Sacristy’ and next and right to one of the external buttresses. Excavated through 0.25m of topsoil. Foundation stones to the buttress [1402] were located at 0.2m depth from the surface. A limestone slab [1403] was found at 0.25m from the surface. It is suggested that the earthing pit mechanism will have to be moved slightly to the north to avoid the buttress foundations [1402] and slightly raised above the limestone slab [1403]



Test Pit 14 showing the downpipe and glazed collared pipe [1401]. Measures 2x0.3m

4.15. TEST PIT 15. Grid Ref No ST 91968 68403.

Test Pit 15 located to the left and corner of the 'Infirmary' passage entrance and adjacent and east of the drain and downpipe [1501]. The 0.3m cubed test pit was excavated through 0.3 metres of topsoil (1500). No archaeological features or finds located.

Test Pit 15 located to the left of the 'Infirmary' arched passage entrance and east of the drain and downpipe



Measures 2x0.3m

4.16. TEST PIT 16. Grid Ref No ST 91969 68456.

Test Pit 16 located to the outer east facing wall of the 'Courtyard' and right of the drain and downpipe [1601]. No archaeological features in the 0.3 metres of topsoil (1600). A limestone slab [1602] was located at 0.3m from the surface. There should be room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 16 located to the right of the downpipe and drain [1601]



Measures 2x0.3m

4.17. TEST PIT 17. Grid Ref No ST 91968 68470.

Test Pit 17 located near the NE corner of the Abbey and to the right of the downpipe and drain flaggy limestone surPround [1701]. Modern glass and broken limestone tiles found within the 0.3m of topsoil (1700). Plenty of room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 17 located to the right of the downpipe and drain [1701]



Measures 2x0.3m



Measures 2x0.3m

4.18. TEST PIT 18. Grid Ref No ST 91960 68470.

Test Pit 18 located near the NE corner of the Abbey and to the right of the downpipe and drain surround [1801]. The original positioning of the mechanism to the right of the doorway and downpipe had to be moved adjacent and right to the other downpipe due to a cast iron overflow pipe below the surface impeding any excavation. A number of container plants had to be removed plus a membrane to access the area. No finds within the 0.3m of topsoil (1800). There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 18 located to the right of the downpipe and drain [1801]. Measures 2x0.3m



4.19. TEST PIT 19. Grid Ref No ST 91951 68472.

Test Pit 19 located central to the outer northern wall of the Abbey and to the right of the double chimney stack. Elder and a small maple had to be cut back to gain access. Modern window glass, broken flaggy limestone and slate were found within the 0.3m depth of topsoil (1900) There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism without any obstacles

Test Pit 19 located to the right of the double chimney stack



Measures 2x0.3m



Measures 2x0.3m

4.20. TEST PIT 20. Grid Ref No ST 91933 68473.

Test Pit 20 located on the outer wall corner of the 'Brew House'. No archaeological features or finds were made though the 0.3m cubed TEST pit was filled with discarded 20th century objects like broken bricks, paving slabs and a scaffolding plate. There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 20 located in the outer wall corner of the 'Brew House'



Measures 2x0.3m



Measures 2x0.3m

4.21. TEST PIT 21. Grid Ref No ST 91928 68473.

Test Pit 21 located to the right of the buttress in the NW corner of the Abbey and the outer wall of the 'Brew House'. No archaeological features or finds were made though the 0.3m cubed test pit. There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 21 located next to the buttressing and outer wall corner of the 'Brew House'



Measures 2x0.3m



Measures 2x0.3m

4.22. TEST PIT 22. Grid Ref No ST 91925 68465.

Test Pit 22 located to the SW outer corner of the 'Brew House'. Footings [2201] were located 0.3m down on the north facing wall. A metal rod, possibly an earthing rod was found to the north side of the test pit. No archaeological features or finds were made through the 0.3m cubed test pit of topsoil (2200). There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism once the old earthing rod is removed.

Test Pit 22 located to the SW outer corner of the 'Brew House'



Measures 2x0.3m

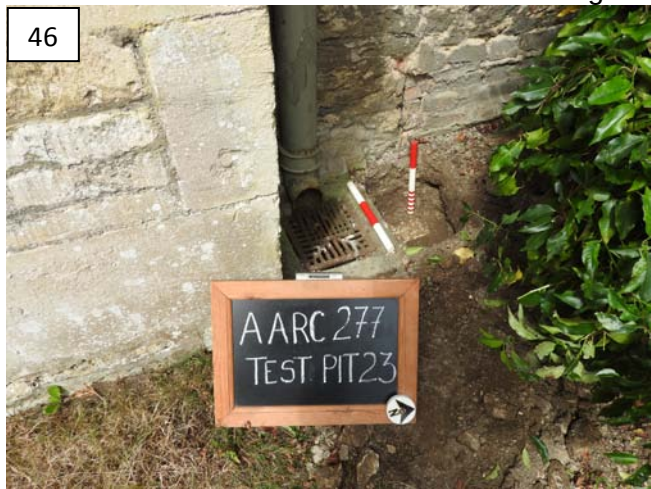


Measures 2x0.3m

4.23. TEST PIT 23. Grid Ref No ST 91934 68403.

Test Pit 23 located towards the NW corner of the ‘Cloister Courtyard’ to the right of the chimney stack and behind a ‘Bay Leaf’ bush. Limestone footings [2303] were located 0.28m down along the east facing wall [2302] and protruding out 0.2m. The test pit was excavated to the north of drain [2301] to a depth of 0.3m through topsoil (2300). Natural alluvial clay (2304) was reached at 0.3m. There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism east of the footings [2303] or to be placed adjacent to the drain [2301] within a raised area of soil.

Test Pit 23 located to the right of the chimney stack and drain



Measures 2x0.3m



Measures 2x0.3m

Test Pit 23 situated in the NW corner of the ‘Cloister Courtyard and behind the Bay leaf bush



4.24. TEST PIT 24. Grid Ref No ST 91953 68390.

Test Pit 24 located towards the SW corner of the 'Cloister Courtyard' and to the right of one of the inner north facing buttresses. The test pit was excavated to the west and adjacent to drain [2401] to a depth of 0.3m through topsoil (2400) containing modern broken brick. Natural alluvial clay (2403) was reached at 0.3m. Foundations of the north facing cloister were [2402] were located just below the surface There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism north of the footings [2402].

Test Pit 24 located to the right of the buttresing and drain



Measures 2x0.3m

The original position of Test pit 24 was in the corner of the SE 'Cloister Courtyard' probably a mistake on the up to date plan. It was decided after consultation that the positioning should actually be to the right of the downpipe and triple buttressing



4.25. TEST PIT 25. Grid Ref No ST 91954 68404.

Test Pit 25 located in the NE corner of the ‘Cloister Courtyard’ and to the left of the drain and downpipe [2501] and angle buttress [2502]. The test pit was excavated to the west and adjacent to drain [2501] to a depth of 0.3m through topsoil (2500). There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism.

Test Pit 25 located in the NE corner of the ‘Cloister Courtyard’



Measures 2x0.3m

4.26. TEST PIT 26. Grid Ref No ST 91935 68426. To be excavated after Hydrangeas are removed.

Test Pit 26 located to the SW corner of the main Courtyard’ and to the right of the drain and downpipe [2601]. The test pit was excavated to the west and adjacent to drain [2601] to a depth of 0.3m through topsoil (2600). The test pit needs to move 0.25 metres to the North to avoid wall and slate damp course [2602]. There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism at 0.3 metres depth.

Test Pit 26 located to the SW corner of the main ‘Courtyard’ showing downpipe, drain and surround [2601], slate damp course [2602] and foundations [2603]



Measures 1x1m.1x0.4m and 2x0.3m

4.27. TEST PIT 27. Grid Ref No ST 91955 68421. Watching brief after flagstone is removed.

4.28. TEST PIT 28. Grid Ref No ST 91959 68460. To be excavated after climbing plant is removed.

Test Pit 28 located to the NE corner of the main Courtyard' and to the right of the drain and downpipe [2802]. The test pit was excavated to the south and adjacent to drain and footings [2802] to a depth of 0.3m through topsoil (2800). The test pit needs to move 0.3 metres to the West of wall [2803] to avoid an electrical conduit and cable [2802] located 0.25 metres down. There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing pit mechanism at 0.3 metres depth.

Test Pit 28 located to the NE corner of the main 'Courtyard' showing downpipe, drain and surround [2802] and electrical conduit and cable [2801]



Measures 1x 0.4m and 2x0.3m

4.29. TEST PIT 29. Grid Ref No ST 91948 68462. To be left due to large Magnolia with the contractor positioning without ground disturbance.

4.30. TEST PIT 30. Grid Ref No ST 91930 68464. To be excavated after Hop is removed.

Test Pit 30 located to the NW corner of the main Courtyard' and to the and to the left of the entrance into the 'Brewhouse'. The test pit was excavated through 0.3 metres of topsoil (3000). The test pit needs to move 0.15 metres away from wall [3002] to avoid an electrical conduit and cable [3001] located 0.28 metres down. Due to its positioning the earthing pit mechanism needs to be raised slightly to avoid the electrical conduit and cable.

Test Pit 30 and electrical conduit and cable [3001]



Measures 1x 0.4m and 2x0.3m

4.31. TEST PIT 31. Grid Ref No ST 91922 68386.

Test Pit 31 located in the SW outer corner of the 'Chaplains Room' and SW corner of the Abbey Courtyard'. The test pit was excavated through 0.3m cubed of topsoil (3100). There is sufficient room to accommodate the earthing mechanism.

Test Pit 31 located in the SW outer corner of the 'Chaplains Room' and SW corner of the Abbey



5. DISCUSSION

The results of the test pitting provided more evidence of the geology of the area. Several of the test pits revealed ancient natural alluvial clay (Test pits 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 23 and 24) 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. The evidence so far provides more proof 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. No archaeological layers or features were found or cut into during the entire test pitting procedure.

The on-site meeting carried out with the contractor and National Trust management on the 4th December resulted in an agreement to carry out a watching brief when required and managed by the National Trust. Some of the test pits might have to be reallocated due to unforeseen circumstances like low ohm electric readings prior to the installations of the earthing pit mechanism.

The positioning of the test pits shown in the WSI had to be re-numbered due to unforeseen circumstances, though the positioning remains basically the same.

6. REFERENCES

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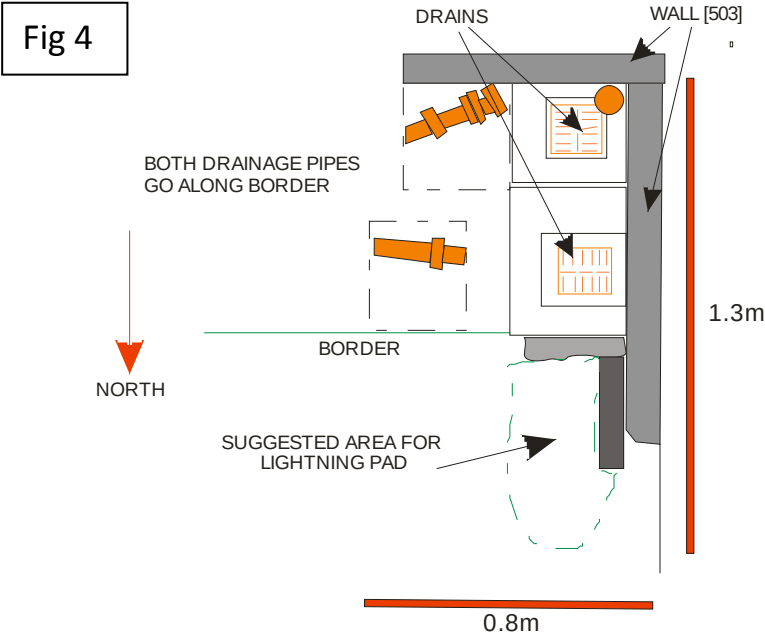
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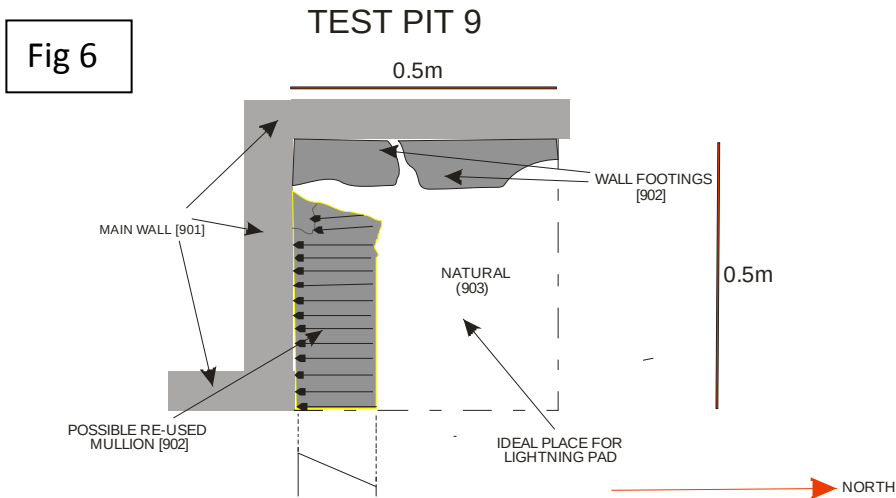
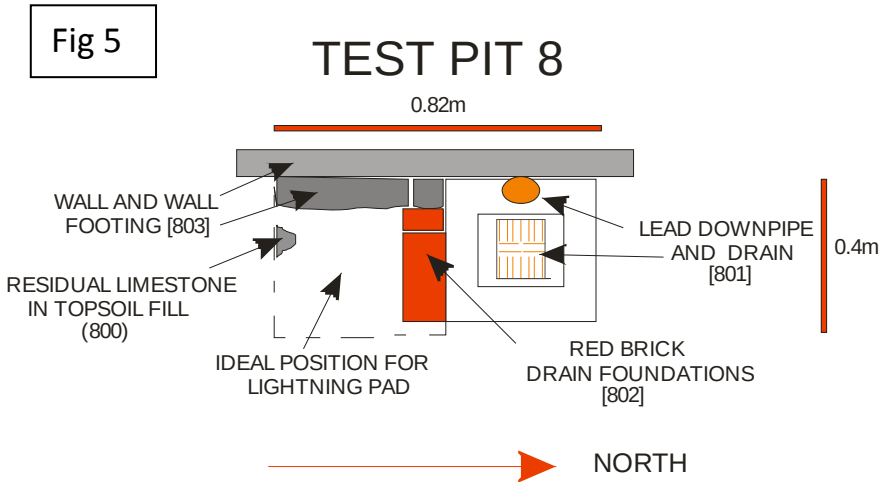
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APPENDICES

TEST PIT 5



TEST PIT 5. SHOWING SEVERAL AREAS WHERE THE LIGHTNING PAD MECHANISMS WOULD NOT BE SUITABLE FOR PLACEMENT DUE TO A NUMBER OF UNDERGROUND DRAIN PIPES ADJACENT TO THE TWO DRAINS SHOWN IN THE DIAGRAM. THE SUGGESTED AREA IS TO THE NORTH AS SHOWN IN THE ILLUSTRATION



TEST PITS 8 AND 9. SHOWING AREAS WHERE THE LIGHTNING PAD MECHANISMS WOULD BE SUITABLE FOR PLACEMENT.