

CEU Site 265, Bisham Abbey, Bisham, Berks. AM 148.

Watching Brief on Construction Work at Tithe Barn Cottage,

Bisham, June, 1989.

The construction work to be carried out by Chelsea/ Leisureland Ltd. comprised a conservatory building approx. 10m by 5m enclosing a swimming pool approx. 10m by 4m. The conservatory was to be built on footings at a depth of approx. 1m. The pool area was to be excavated to a depth of approx. 1.4m. The larger part of the building was to replace existing recent brick extensions to the garage, part to extend into the garden. The site lies close to the only surviving section of the abbey's surrounding moat (to the east, adjacent to the tithe barn) and is therefore very peripheral to the monastic complex.

The site was visited on Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd of June but despite assurances from Mr Hunt of Chelsea/Leisureland demolition was still in progress and excavations had not begun. The site was visited again on Wednesday 7th June when excavations of the pool began using a mini-excavator. A trench approx. 0.50m wide was excavated around the western, northern and eastern edges of the pool area to a depth of 1.35m and this provided sufficient evidence to assess the site.

It was found that the majority of the pool area was within what had been the abbey moat but which had been backfilled in this area to provide access to Tithe Barn Cottage and Grange Cottage (see attached plans). On the south side of the pool at a depth of 1.35m there were still recent backfill layers. On the north side the original moat edge was found and beyond this a narrow strip of undisturbed subsoil at a depth of approx. 0.40m overlain by some rubble levelling for the recent yard surface. This area would originally have been the berm of the moat ditch and one small body sherd of pottery of probable Saxo-Norman date (ident. by V. Denham) was found on the subsoil surface here. There were no other finds or structural features other than of 20th century date.

Where the moat survives as a present day feature to the east, adjacent to the tithe barn itself, it can be seen that the weathering cone of the silted-in moat extends almost to the wall of the tithe barn. It seems that the moat originally continued towards the river in a straight line parallel to the long axis of the tithe barn although an entrance bridge might be expected close by, in line with the road approaching from the west along the river bank. Possibly the south wall of the tithe barn continued the line of a monastic enclosure wall.

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June 9th, 1989.