

The Tithe Barn at Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School

From the Garton Archive: Item of Interest No 18



The photograph above shows the Tithe Barn, owned by the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral, in 1948. Dating back to the 15th century (c 1440), the impressive building is situated below the present Vicars' Court in Lincoln, and above the Christ's Hospital Girls' High School (LHS) building. It may be approached by climbing Greestone Stairs from Lindum Hill, or by walking down Greestone Place from the east end of the Cathedral. Sir Francis Hill, Chairman of Governors of LHS and eminent local historian, has written about the building in the Summer 1948 edition of the School magazine. Sir Francis informed us that Oliver Sutton, Bishop of Lincoln in the thirteenth century, ordered a court to be built in which the vicars of the Cathedral might live together. By 1309 a hall, kitchen and several rooms had been built apparently for the senior vicars, because in 1328 additional quarters were ordered for the junior vicars. However it is likely that it was more than one hundred years later that the building known as the Tithe Barn was completed.

Sir Francis informed us that in 1851 Mr JS Padley wrote of the building that the fireplace of the vicars' kitchen was at the east end of the building. Its purpose

appeared to have been for offices, with a refectory or dining hall above, although there is apparently no evidence to determine whether or not it was used for that purpose. Although some of the original doorways remain, the front of the building has been barbarously broken and disfigured by making breaches within it, without the least regard for the original design. However, Sir Francis described the walls, doors, windows and buttresses as having been wrought with excellent workmanship. The east window remains intact, but all the rest have been mutilated. The four vicars each had a portion of the building, which they used as stables and granaries. The building was badly damaged by Cromwell's troops during the Civil War.

The name 'tithe' signifies a tenth part of an annual income to be paid as a tax, especially for the support of the Church and its clergy. This therefore suggests that at some time during its history the Tithe Barn was used to collect such taxes. However Sir Francis wrote that, although we cannot be certain of the original purpose of the building, we can be sure that we have all been misinformed in calling it a 'tithe barn'. It is apparent that the building never had the large doors which a barn requires, and there is no indication that the vicars ever enjoyed any tithe.

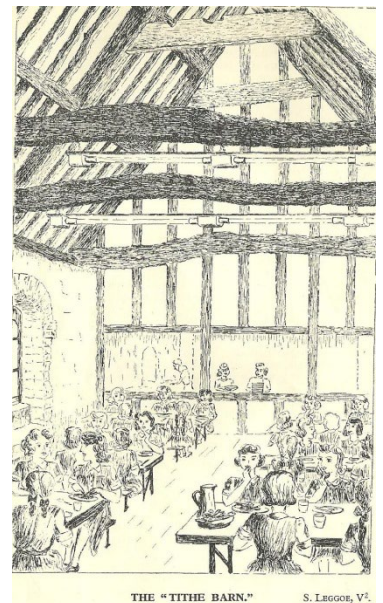
The same edition of the LHS magazine noted that the Summer term of 1948 began on April 15th, and that the 'Tithe Barn' had been used for the School dinners for the first time. School dinners had of course been available before, but more space was needed, and the change also coincided with the 1944 Education Act's initiative to provide free school meals for children. Richard Lucas remembers a dining hall being built at around the same time at Lincoln School, where he was a pupil.

The Act made it an entitlement for pupils to receive a free school meal, although five years later a small charge of twopence halfpenny was introduced, which was gradually increased until legislation in 1980 removed the requirement of LEAs to provide a meal for every pupil. Since that date the authorities have only been required to provide a meal for those pupils deemed to be eligible for a free meal.

The photograph below, juxtaposed with the delightful sketch by fifth-former

Sheila Leggoe, who won several art prizes at LHS, captured the scene perfectly and evokes memories of over-cooked meat, watery cabbage, lumpy mashed potatoes and semolina pudding!

It may be inferred from Miss Cleave's Speech Day address, reported in the Christmas 1946 edition of the LHS magazine, that work began on the restoration of the Tithe Barn during that year.



The Tithe Barn dining hall was formally opened by the Bishop of Lincoln appropriately enough at a luncheon party on 7th June 1948. Informing readers that a special pre-term staff meeting had been called to discuss the implications of the new facility, Headmistress Miss IV Cleave wrote in the School magazine that readers would hardly conceive how much organisation a school dinner hour required! True to form, she also took the opportunity to remind parents '...to make a concerted attempt to improve their children's manners, particularly at table.' Pointing out that the children would now eat in gracious surroundings, she issued the warning that a higher standard of behaviour was being set, and that many children fell lamentably far below it. Mary Lucas, née West, who was a pupil at the time, has a somewhat different view of the event. Seemingly unaware of the privilege of dining in the splendid historic surroundings, she and many others found it irksome to have to climb

up Greestone Stairs to eat school dinner, especially in bad weather! She also recalls that Miss Cleave's campaign to improve table manners had started long before, when eagle-eyed staff heading each table would reproach the pupils on a daily basis for their 'rough' manners and speech! I do not recall masters having lunch with pupils in the dining room at Lincoln School, where senior boys acted as heads of tables, and were responsible for ensuring equal helpings and good discipline. My memory is that they were not always particularly good role-models!

In making a reference to Sir Francis Hill's warning about the origins of the 'Tithe' Barn, Miss Cleave reported that the School would cling to the time-honoured name, whilst being duly cautious in imagining the purpose which it served in bygone days. She concluded that section of her Upper School Speech Day address by asking her audience to imagine, historical associations apart, how many schools would have so fine a refectory. The building currently forms part of the School of Art and Design of the University of Lincoln, and is equipped with a fine lecture theatre. As the Department is shortly to move to the University's main campus, the immediate future of the building remains unsure. As it is host to many paranormal stories, perhaps those ghostly inhabitants will be left in peace for a while!



The Tithe Barn in 2013 (Photograph by Catherine Forbes)



The Tithe Barn equipped as a lecture theatre in 2013

Acknowledgements

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Assistant Archivist at LCHS
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