

STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 32

BLACKFRIARS 1ST SITE

Asset/Monument Type: Friary.

Summary: Temporary site of the Black friars in Oxford, occupied for only 15 years. The extent of the first site of the Black Friars is uncertain. Documentary records indicate that it was located on St Aldates to the north of St Frideswide's. It is likely the friars occupied existing accommodation before moving to their new site on Speedwell Street.

Location (NGR): SP51410607.

Definition: A friary is a settlement housing a community of male mendicants. It is normally composed of a discrete group of buildings and open spaces bounded by a precinct wall. In contrast to monasteries of the 12th century reformed orders, the friars' main concerns were preaching, evangelism and learning. Strict enclosure or segregation from the secular world was not, therefore, a factor in planning their sites. Their orders prohibited private property, so that their subsistence was achieved through the alms and gifts of benefactors. The distribution and morphology of their houses reflect these aims.

Version: 12/2/2012

Key characteristics

The following criteria (which are not in any order of ranking), are based on the Secretary of State's criteria for assessing Scheduled Monuments. They should not be regarded as definitive, but as an indicative provisional assessment.

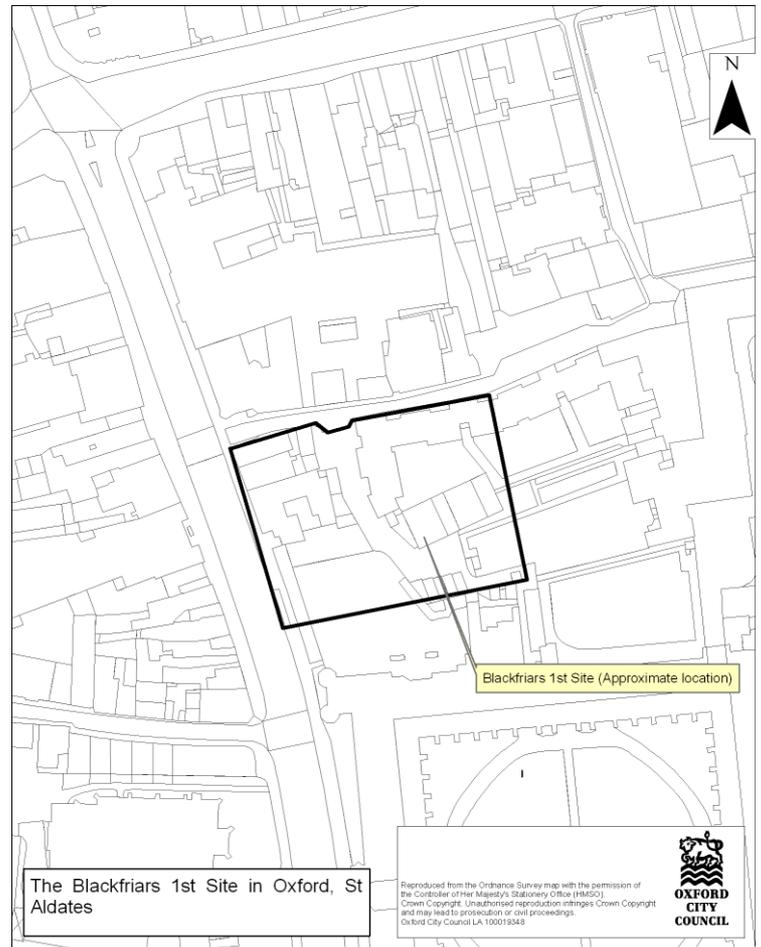
1. **Period:** Does the asset characterise a category or historic period?

Assessment: The friary was occupied for just 26 years. Friaries are just one of many asset types which characterise the medieval period.

Score: Low

2. **Rarity:** What is the rarity of the asset in terms of regional and national context?

Assessment: Friaries are relatively rare within the corpus of medieval ecclesiastical monuments in England. Although the number of medieval friaries can be estimated fairly accurately from surviving documentation (189). Only 15 of the original 189 friaries have left substantial extant remains. The Dominicans were represented by 20 houses before 1250, (Knowles and Hadcock 1953; Butler 1984). The main mendicant orders associated with



English friaries include the Franciscans (Greyfriars), Dominicans (Blackfriars), Austin Friars and Carmelites (Whitefriars). Oxford was one of 13 towns to have friaries belonging to all four of the major orders. (Newcastle upon Tyne, Lincoln, York, Boston, Stamford, Kings Lynn, Norwich, Cambridge, Northampton, Oxford, London, Bristol and Winchester).

Score: Medium

3. **Documentation:** *To what extent is the significance of the asset enhanced by existing documentation or lack thereof?*

Assessment: few records from the friary itself survive and our knowledge is primarily gained from references from other sources such as the St Frideswide's archives

Score: Low

4. **Group Value:** *is the value of the asset enhanced by its association with related contemporary monuments or with monuments of different periods?*

Assessment: Oxford is notable in having a cluster of friaries with seven orders represented in the city over nine sites. The Dominican Blackfriars are recorded in two locations, the first in temporary accommodation, the second in a larger purpose built precinct

Score: Medium

5. **Survival/Condition:** *What is the estimated level of above and below ground survival.*

Assessment: No known structures from the site survive, it is likely the first site of the Blackfriars was temporary accommodation with little monastic alteration

Score: Low

6. **Fragility/Vulnerability:** *susceptibility to change*

Assessment: No obvious current issues.

Score: Low

7. **Diversity:** *Does the asset possess a combination of high quality features?*

Assessment: The form and size of standing and excavated examples of friaries suggests a great variation in building format, constructional technique, size and cloister orientation. However in this case there is no evidence for extent and character of features present.

Score: Low

8. **Potential:** *Is there a likelihood that currently unrecorded evidence can be anticipated?*

Assessment: Archaeological investigations in the area have so far failed to identify monastic evidence

Score: Low

Overall score (10/24)

Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: Low

HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

The Dominican Black Friars came to Oxford in 1221 first settling on St Aldate's just north of St Frideswide's in an area traditionally known as the Jewish Quarter before transferring to their second site, much larger on Speedwell Street in 1247 (Hinness 1938, 57). It is uncertain to what extent the land was in Jewish ownership prior to the foundation of the friary and no documentary evidence has been found to indicate early ownership.

At St Aldate's they built an oratory dedicated to the Virgin Mary and began teaching, the two sites were inhabited by the Black Friars at the same time for a few years until the new site was built (Knowles & Hadcock 1971, 218). After the friars left the site was remained with St Frideswide's until 1271 when documentary evidence indicates it was held by a Jew. Following the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 the site reverted to St Frideswide's and was later redeveloped as part of Christ Church in the 16th century.

Academic statements

MPP Class Description

In selecting examples of national importance an attempt should be made to identify a variety of site types and situations, examples with differing proportions of standing remains and sites prioritised by reference to their historical descriptors. For example, a house belonging to one of the more rare orders may be considered important (Crutched Friars, Friars of the Sack, Pied Friars, Trinitarians and Observants). The diversity of types that characterises friaries requires both common and unusual types to be selected. Examples of the major orders with good survival, potential and documentation should be represented, in addition to any sites attributable to the minor orders (English Heritage, 1989)

Research agenda

- What is the potential for evidence relating to the Jewish Quarter? Area was known to have passed between Jewish and Christian ownership throughout the 13th century
- Can the layout of the friary be further defined?
- The archaeology of medieval Oxford has exceptional potential to provide further insights into patterns of urban change and the evolving relationship, and disparities of wealth and lifestyle, between 'town and gown', between college institutions and religious institutions.
- Can we learn more about the daily life within religious institutions – the diet and health, daily routine?
- There were several failed friaries in Oxford; can these be identified in the archaeological record?
- Do the early ecclesiastical sites preserve any material culture or structural elements that can be associated with the development of learning (styli, book clasps, lamps, libraries etc)? Such features and objects would be of particular interest.
- Can the material culture and architecture of the friaries and abbeys tell us more about the relative wealth and functions of rival orders?

Associated Monuments

UAD Monument 36: Black Friars, first site (13th century)

UAD Monument 99: Tennis Courts, Christ Church (post medieval)

UAD Monument 604: Historic buildings, St Aldates

UAD Monument 673: Christ Church park and garden

UAD Monument 729: St Aldates

UAD Monument 773: Medieval settlement, Salter South East 1

UAD Monument 802: Late Saxon settlement South East Sector

Associated Events

- *Excavations, Blue Boar Quad, 1965 (UAD 420)*. The lowest archaeological level contained 11th century rubbish pits overlain by road metalling from the early 12th century. This southern part of Alfred Street was closed in 1546. The footings and pits of 12th century and later houses fronting on to the street were also found. A sherd of samian ware was found in one of the pits. In 1966 the 17th century tennis court was demolished as part of the project
- *Watching brief, 1980 (UAD 1537)*. During work on the water mains a scatter of non-calcareous pebbles was observed at a depth of 1.8m. This may be the remains of an early street surface.

Bibliography

- Butler, L , 1984 'The Houses of the Mendicant Orders in Britain: Recent Archaeological Work'.
In P V Addyman and V E Black (eds) *Archaeological Papers from York presented to M W Barley*. York. York Archaeological Trust. 123-136
- Hinnebusch, W, 1938 The Pre-Reformation Sites of the Oxford Blackfriars. *Oxoniensia*: 3 57-65
- Knowles, D, & Hadcock, R, 1971 *Medieval Religious houses of England and Wales*. London: Longman