

STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 33

BLACKFRIARS 2ND SITE

Asset/Monument Type: Friary

Summary: The second site of the Dominican Blackfriars was a large purpose built precinct to the south of the town wall close to St Aldates. The precinct was established c1236 and remained until the Dissolution. The site included monastic, industrial and domestic structures. The full extent of the friary remains unclear, historic maps indicate a large area of terracing or enclosures surrounding the main precinct. Archaeological investigations have been able to produce an indicative plan of the precinct.

Location (NGR): SP51100596

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.

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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.

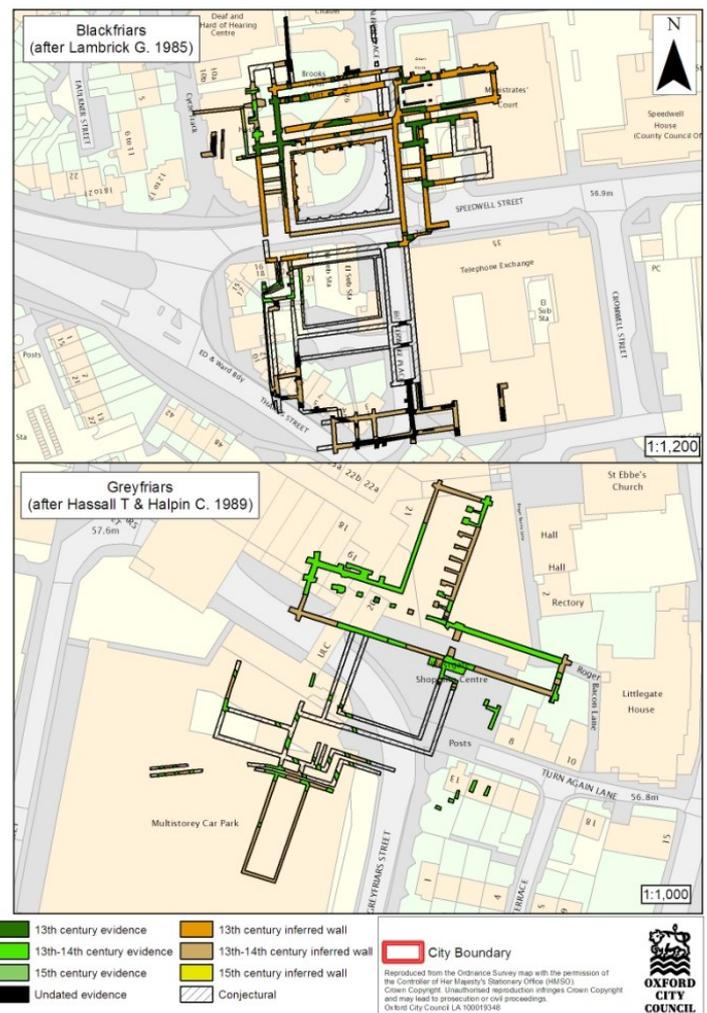
1. **Period:** Does the asset characterise a category or historic period?

Assessment: The friary was occupied for over 300 years. Friaries are just are one of many asset types which characterise the medieval period.

Score: Medium

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). Although a common monument in the medieval period, their lack of survival after 1540 is distinctive with little or no documentation and limited evidence for their location and extent.

Score: High

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. There is good archaeological documentation.

Score: Medium

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: A medieval gateway (two jambs of a big archway) survives in a 17th century cottage on Littlegate Street (Sherwood and Pevsner 1974: 328). No other known structures from the friary survive, however excavation has indicated a good below ground survival.

Score: Medium

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

Assessment: The site has been subject to a number of recent developments, with the most recent using a pile design to preserve friary burials in situ.

Score: Medium

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. The layout of the friary has been reconstructed by Lambrick. The burial ground has been located. the church choir, chantry and nave, the north and west ranges of the cloister, the galilee, a garden, anchor house, cemetery and children's cemetery, chapter house, the prior's lodgings and a number of domestic structures south of the cloister have been identified.

Score: High

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

Assessment: Previous archaeological investigations have recorded excellent evidence of features of national importance. There is good potential for unrecorded evidence including waterlogged remains.

Score: High

Overall score (19/24)

Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: High

HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

The Dominican Black Friars came to Oxford in 1221 first settling on St Aldates just north of St Frideswide's before transferring to a new larger site at Speedwell Street in 1236 (Hinnesbusch 1938: 57). Hinnesbusch provides a detailed description of the buildings of the Black Friars based on documentary sources suggesting the main building was located in the northern half of the precinct, the church comprising a long nave and choir area with a second structure on an east-west alignment (*ibid.*: 76). The new site, covering approximately nine hectares, was bordered by a series of channels cut for branches of the river Thames. Access to the town was via Preachers Bridge up to Littlegate to the north or through the mill on Preachers Lane to the east (Lambrick and Woods 1976: 203). The Blackfriars first opened their school for monks of their order in 1229 and this was closed with the friary at the Dissolution (VCH ii: 107), although the order returned to Oxford in 1921.

A series of small excavations in the Black Friars precinct carried out between 1961 and 1985 revealed sufficient evidence to reconstruct a large part of the Black Friars precinct which appears to have been a fairly typical plan with the associated cemetery to the north of the site (Hassall 1974; Lambrick and Woods 1976; Lambrick 1985). The western area of the precinct includes the west end of the church and the north aisle, the north and west ranges of the cloister, the galilee, a garden and an anchor house (Lambrick and Woods 1976: 170). The excavations revealed that the precinct had substantial foundations packed with clay, presumably for waterproofing. Later excavations indicated that there had been a small extension on the west end of the church. Several burials were found in the presumed chapter house area, including those of two children. A further 22 burials were found in the nave and the cloister alley. In the eastern area of the precinct excavations recorded evidence of priory activity, the choir, chantry, nave, chapter house, eastern range of the cloisters a yard and the prior's lodgings. To the south of the main precinct successive excavations also recorded evidence of the south cloister range and a number of domestic structures south of the cloister (*ibid.*: 170). In 2007 a watching brief at Albion Place identified structures and several interments related to the priory. No grave cuts were recorded, only disarticulated skeletons. Subsequent development was designed to preserve the remains *in situ*. The 2007 investigation noted that whilst there is some localised variance with the plan of the priory as set out in Lambrick 1985 (e.g. the more northerly location of the Choir wall and buttress) the hypothesised layout is accurate (Brown 2008).

A 15th century drain at the site produced evidence for medicinal plants, including opium poppy, greater celandine, hemlock and henbane (Robinson 1985)

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)

The English Heritage Monument Class Description for Friaries refers to the Oxford Blackfriars a number of times, with reference to the notable environmental archaeological undertaken, the use of the spatial distribution of decorated glass and tile to reconstruct the appearance of various parts of the friary, for finds which reveal a particularly monastic character to the site include the patens, lead pencils, ink wells and rarer finds like the wooden disc from Oxford which formed “part of a sand-glass frame and stills for fragrances and alchemy”. Dominican Oxford and Austin Friary at Leicester produced evidence for covered cloister walkways developed from paths and for the western portion of the chapter houses at these sites being reserved for the burial of children.

Research agenda

- 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.
- The plan-form of a number of friaries and abbeys have been archaeologically investigated; can we learn more about the daily life within religious institutions – the diet and health, daily routine?
- There is good potential for the sites of religious houses located on reclaimed land in the floodplain to preserve environmental evidence for diet, land-use and water and fish management.
- 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 6: 19th century gasworks

UAD Monument 31: Oxford Blackfriars 2nd site

UAD Monument 32: Precinct of the Blackfriars

UAD Monument 33: Church of the Blackfriars

UAD Monument 35: Blackfriars market garden

UAD Monument 586: Blackfriars mill stream

UAD Monument 587: Shire Lake

UAD Monument 647: Friars Wharf

UAD Monument 714: Littlegate Street

UAD Monument 805: Late Saxon settlement, East Suburb

UAD Monument 919: Friars Meadow Stream

Associated Events

- *Butteels Chapel, 1829-31 (UAD 1458)*. Record of stone coffins during construction.
- *Observations, Albert Street in 1870 (UAD 265)*. A length of wall was observed under the road in Albert Street. Modern excavations suggest it may have been the eastern wall of a north nave at Blackfriars church. On the eastern side of the wall was a lead coffin, the foot butted up against it.

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- *Blackfriars area in 1876 (UAD 1296)*. Professor Rolleston collected skulls from around half a dozen individuals from Cambridge Street, Speedwell Street and Brewer Street. There is no information as to date, but they may be associated with Blackfriars graveyard.
 - *Observations, Baptist Chapel, 19th century (UAD 271)*. When the foundations for the Baptist Chapel were dug c30 stone coffins, aligned EW, were found. Another was found in Albert Street in line with the chapel. The burials were probably from Blackfriars churchyard.
 - *Finds, Gas Companies works 1923 (UAD 721)*. A coin of Antonius Pius was found.
 - *Excavations, Speedwell Street 1926 (UAD 253)*. Workmen reported that a tiled floor had been found. Excavations in 1974 suggested that a building had stood there, separate from the main priory complex. It may have been the school.
 - *Excavations, 40 Albert Street 1945 (UAD 270)*. A row of four stone coffins was found.
 - *Excavations, Albert Street 1961 (UAD 189)*. Massive rubble foundations of probably the south wall were found. North of the wall were burials. Later work would suggest that the foundations were from the north side of the nave. The cemetery was to the north of this.
 - *Excavations, Albert Place 1966-7 (UAD 209)*. More substantial evidence for the friary precinct including a possible porch and boundary wall between the approach and the precinct, a 15th century choir and graveyard to the north with evidence of 13th century walls underlying it and the prior's lodgings.
 - *Excavations, Albert Street 1969 (UAD 223)*. Work carried out on the west side of the street uncovered the west end of the church. Walls from the end of the nave and the aisles were found, although most of the stone had been robbed. The findings enabled the plan of the church to be completed. Several burials and a stone coffin were found.
 - *Excavations, 8-10 Cambridge Terrace 1971 (UAD 266)*. Work did not disturb any foundations of Blackfriars.
 - *Blackfriars Gateway Restoration, 1972 (UAD 258)*. The 15th century Gateway was discovered during reconstruction of the Centre for the Deaf when a 17th century cottage at the southern end of Littlegate Street was restored. To the south the relieving arch of a pedestrian entrance survived. The gateway is now visible and a fireplace has been removed from the larger arch.
 - *Excavations, Blackfriars 1972 (UAD 259)*. Extensive excavations of the precinct of the Blackfriars recorded evidence of land reclamation prior to the construction of 13th century church, the east range of the cloisters and evidence of a wattle fence lined ditch, possibly a boundary or drainage ditch, from around 1220. Several burials were found in the presumed chapter house area, including two children. Subsequent work in 1974 identified numerous additional burials within and around a western extension of the church. Floor levels had been renewed at frequent intervals. After the priory had been demolished following the Dissolution the site was used for ornamental gardens and some evidence in the form of gullies was found for this 17th century activity.
 - *Wharf House, Thames Street, in 1979 (UAD 293)*. Excavations recorded evidence of the south range of the cloister, evidence of Little Cloister and a possible kitchen annexe. A culvert producing useful palaeo-environmental evidence was also recorded running alongside the southern domestic buildings was backfilled by the 14th century.
 - *Albion Place in 1983 (UAD 294)*. Additional evidence for the nave, north and south aisles of the Great Cloister and a number of additional burials to the north of the nave.

- *Clark's Row in 1980 (UAD 467)*. Contractors exposed a 20 m long culvert which passed under Clark's House on the line of the Blackfriars Mill Stream. The culvert dates from the 19th century. Some pottery was recovered from the surface of the silt within the culvert.
- *Finds, Thames Street in 1980 (UAD 555)*. A 14th or 15th century half groat, possibly Henry IV or Henry V, was found in fill which had slipped into a well.
- *Luther Terrace in 1983 (UAD 295)*. Two river channels running WE, probably with the tip of an eyot between, were found, but no waterfront development. Channels and ditches showed signs of natural silting, but deliberate dumping occurred later, particularly in the 17th and 19th centuries. One layer contained 14th century material, but it is not clear whether this represents deliberate dumping. The chronology of the site is difficult to elucidate.

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