

STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 36

GREYFRIARS

Asset/Monument Type: Friary

Summary: The Franciscans first settled in Oxford in St Ebbe's in 1224. They rapidly acquired land outside the walls and subsequently built an extensive precinct across the line of the near contemporary 13th century town wall. A number of notable Franciscan scholars are associated with the friary. The friary lasted until the Dissolution when it passed into private hands. The buildings were subsequently demolished and part of the land retained as pleasure gardens. The layout of the friary has been hypothesised based on the results of archaeological investigations.

Location (NGR): SP51140597

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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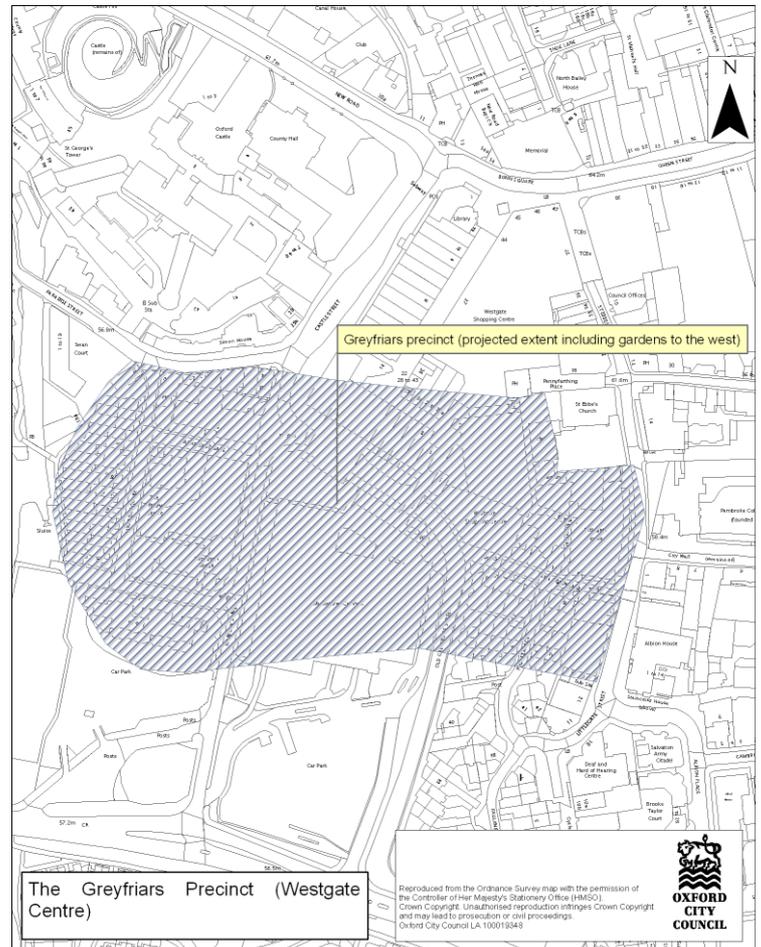
Key characteristics

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 an asset category or historic period?

Assessment: The friary is a long-lived asset in use from 1220s until the Dissolution. In terms of representing a historic period friaries are just one of many medieval monuments which characterise the 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 most numerous mendicant friaries in England were that of the Franciscans, who had established 40 houses before 1240 and eventually had 60 (Knowles and Hadcock 1953; Butler 1984). Oxford was one of first three Franciscan Friary's to be established (along with London and Canterbury) and is associated with a number of important Franciscan Scholars who were influential in establishing both the University of Oxford and wider academic traditions.

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 Osney Abbey archives. The site has good archaeological documentation.

Score: High

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 friary has group value with other contemporary Franciscan sites. The site is built across the 13th century city wall.

Score: High

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

Assessment: Above ground remains do not survive, with the exception of a consolidated section of the chancel wall located in a specially constructed basement in the Westgate Sainsbury's supermarket. This section was exposed by excavation and no other extant remains survive. Previous excavations have identified robbed walls and moderate preservation of environmental remains. The Trill Mill Channel has significant potential for waterlogged deposits associated with water management features and the friary mill.

Score: Medium

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

Assessment: The site has an existing consent for extensive basement development which would remove the bulk of the remaining deposits.

Score: High

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 precise layout and function of the Grey friars buildings remains unclear, however the church and cemetery have been identified.

Score: Medium

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

Assessment: The site has significant potential for below ground remains, recent evaluation has demonstrated moderate levels of survival and preservation.

Score: Medium

Overall score (20/24)

Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: High

HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

The Franciscan House of the Grey Friars initially rented houses in St Ebbe's in around 1224, before moving to new accommodation between the city wall and Church Street the following year (Little 1892: 2). They were subsequently bequeathed a number of properties in an area west of St Ebbe's Street that by 1310 extended as far west as the River Thames. The earliest constructions on site consisted of a small infirmary and a chapel built c.1225 replaced with the new church begun in 1246 (Hassall 1970: 11). The new church involved the removal of the city wall between the Watergate and the postern near the Castle provided for an extension of the line of the wall around their precinct (VCH ii: 124). The new City Wall thus formed the northern edge of the new church. Like the Black Friars, the Grey Friars established a school here in the 14th century that was part of the university. At the Dissolution the property of the Grey Friars was leased for several years before it was sold to Richard Andrews of Hales who dismantled the buildings (*ibid.*: 126). The gardens of the Greyfriars at Paradise Square remained in existence long after the precinct had been removed and were still visible on maps until the 17th century.

Archaeological investigations on the site of the Grey Friars Church in 1970, undertaken in advance of construction of the Westgate centre, revealed a partial layout of the church, including robbed out features, although the original chapel was not found (Hassall 1970: 11). A number of burials were recorded across the site. Excavations in 1971 at 35-37 Church Street also recorded human remains indicating that the cemetery may have extended as far east as here (Hassall, 1972, 139). At least 3 metres of post-Reformation build-up above the medieval church were also recorded. Later excavations to the south of the main church in 1973 recorded evidence for the cloister and several additional buildings that extended the friary south towards the Trill Mill Stream (Hassall 1974: 60).

Archaeological investigations at Paradise Square in 1994 recorded evidence of a loamy soil layer at a depth of c.0.3 metres that may represent an orchard predating the Greyfriars occupation of the site. Evidence for the extensive formal gardens was also recorded at a depth of around 0.30 metres (Hardy and Moore 1994: 5). A regular alignment of gullies was recorded indicating cultivation in the area from the 12th to 13th centuries.

Archaeological investigations to the south of the Westgate centre in 2006 recorded further evidence of the Greyfriars site primarily in the form of robber trenches but some deposits thought to be land reclamation were also noted (Bashford 2006: 54). The evaluation results suggested that the precinct was more extensive than previously thought. A second phase of evaluation in 2008 recorded further evidence of land reclamation prior to the construction of Greyfriars as well as further robber trenches, evidence of an early western boundary for the friary and water management features along the Trill Mill Stream to the south of the precinct (Bashford 2008a).

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

- Can the function and layout of the precinct buildings be established? Was a library present?
- The extent of industrial activity associated with a subsidiary cloister is also a prime objective in excavation (From EH Monument Class Description Report).
- 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 were several failed friaries in Oxford; can these be identified in the archaeological record?
- 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 2: Saxon defences (site of). Probable line of former burh defences

UAD Monument 4: City Wall (site of). Former line of City Wall

UAD Monument 51: Oxford Greyfriars (site of)

UAD Monument 52: Oxford Friars of the Sack (site of)

UAD Monument 53: Monastic precinct (site of)

UAD Monument 54: Church of Greyfriars (site of)

UAD Monument 55: Paradise Gardens (site of)

UAD Monument 234: Holy Trinity Vicarage, Charles Street

UAD Monument 236: Greyfriars, Paradise Street (site of)

UAD Monument 237: The Jolly Farmers Inn, Paradise Street

UAD Monument 324: Greyfriars Priory, Charles Street (site of)

UAD Monument 436: City Wall Postern, King's Terrace (site of)

UAD Monument 558: Greyfriars Mill (site of)

UAD Monument 585: Trill Mill Stream

UAD Monument 704: Church Street (site of)

UAD Monument 730: St Ebbe's Street

UAD Monument 919: Friars Meadow Stream

Associated Events

- *Excavations, 30-33 Pensons Gardens in 1960 (UAD 183):* Only 19th century pottery was found.

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- *Excavations, Church Street, 1968-72 (UAD 210)*: Evidence of a Saxon ditch running NS recorded sealed below 10th-11th century street surfaces along with pits and finds of middle to late Saxon date. Early medieval development also recorded including wells and rubbish pits, hearths and ovens. Earliest structure on the street frontage dated to the 14th century. Post-medieval property boundaries also recorded
 - *Excavations, Greyfriars, 1968-72 (UAD 211)*: Limited Saxon evidence underlying the friary although some early medieval pits, wells and pottery noted. Line of the City Wall recorded along with late medieval masonry incorporated into the wall indicating an association with the Greyfriars. Further excavation revealed the plan of the church, of which robber trenches and some stretches of masonry wall remained. Where the walls had become post-medieval property boundaries survival was better. North of the nave remains of chapels were exposed, one with the altar base and some floor tiles still in place. Only one conventual building was found, immediately north of the 'walking place'. This had later been incorporated into the cemetery. A large number of burials were found, one with a stone coffin. The site was used for market gardens and small properties until the 19th century.
 - *Excavations, Greyfriars, 1967-8 (UAD 214)*: Three burials were found, one in a stone coffin.
 - *Excavations, St Ebbe's, 1967-8 (UAD 215)*: Burials were found on the north side of the street. A rubbish pit extended well into the road at the west end of Church Street, suggesting the road had formerly been considerably narrower.
 - *Excavations, Littlegate 1971 (UAD 239)*: Early medieval features predating the City Wall were found. There was no trace of any earlier defences such as an earthen bank. A basement or undercroft was cut into the gravel. A stone lined oven and rubbish pits were also found. Above these were several phases of wall, including the west wall of the Littlegate, originally the Water gate, and the walls built by the Greyfriars. To the north were foundations from a substantial building possibly a barn or granary.
 - *Excavations, Albion Place, 1971 (UAD 244)*: The Trill Mill stream was recorded west of the Preacher's Bridge.
 - *Excavations, Greyfriars 1973 (UAD 273)*: Many robbed walls were found, but it was not possible to interpret them fully. Many were not straight and floor levels were not helpful. A culvert passed through the buildings, taking water from Trill Mill stream. It could have been a kitchen drain.
 - *Evaluation, Paradise Square in 1994-5 (UAD 315)*: The silts were cut by gullies which suggested drainage for raised cultivation beds dated to the 12th and 13th centuries. A single human burial was found, possibly connected to the Friars of the Sack who held the land for a short period in the 13th century.
 - *Turn Again Lane, 1975 (UAD 325)*: Walls and robber trenches from the south and east ranges of the Great Cloister. Floor surfaces, one with in situ tile were found. The robber trenches contained 17th century pottery.
 - *Excavations, Greyfriars 1975-6 (UAD 326)*: Evidence of the cloister, choir and possible bell tower recorded. Cut by these structures were walls and robber trenches with an associated rough cobbled floor. This was thought to be a primary cloister, replaced in the early 14th century.
 - *Excavations, Paradise Street, 1977 (UAD 311)*: Layer of thick clay daub spread from 11th century occupation overlain by river silts, but in the 14th century a building was built on the site. Soil layers overlay this and there was evidence from the 19th century brewery in

the upper layers. A second trench revealed a series of river walls. The 14th century post hole structure was replaced by a stone wall in the 15th century

- *Evaluation, Paradise Street, 1993 (UAD 434)*: Evidence of 11th-12th century occupation, including a wall, were seen above the natural gravel. The site was then covered with gravel which was overlain with loam, probably from late medieval gardens. Around 1500 a structure and a stone drain were constructed. This phase was covered by late post medieval rubble. A Victorian cellar has disturbed the upper layers considerably.
- *Watching Brief, Paradise Square, 1979 (UAD 539)*: dark brown humic layer was revealed which contained a little 17th century pottery. This would correspond with the gardens shown on Loggan's map. Above this the former gardens had a layer of mixed fill, possibly associated with 19th century building.
- *Watching Brief, Paradise Street, 1983 (UAD 568)*: Post medieval pits recorded
- *Watching Brief, Norfolk Street, 1986 (UAD 581)*: The only archaeological levels exposed contained 19th century house footings and garden soils.
- *Excavations, Paradise Square, 1989 (UAD 589)*: Natural gravel was reached at c2 m. This was overlain by cultivated loams, from the gardens known in the area from the 17th century at the latest.
- *Excavations, 9 King's Terrace 1960 (UAD 670)*: In the garden the apparent footings of the City Wall were seen to have re-used late medieval worked stone.
- *Finds, Littlegate in c1869 (UAD 700)*: A Roman bronze fibula was found in a garden.
- *Finds, Church Street, St Ebbe's (UAD 755)*: 14th- 15th century ridge tile with green glaze recorded
- *Observations, Paradise Square, 19th century (UAD 1395)*: Foundations of a wide wall were found 1 m below the surface, running NS from the river to Paradise Street.
- *Trill Mill Stream, (UAD 1716)*: Possible channel of 'proto Trill Mill Stream', evidence for a quarrying and levelling that maybe related to construction of Greyfriars and two walls associated with Friary.
- *Evaluation, Westgate Centre, 2006 (UAD 1754)*: Evidence of the Saxon reed swamp recorded with number of medieval and post medieval channel cuts some with timber revetting. Some evidence to suggest part overlain with a stone surface and may represent a post medieval ford across the Trill Mill Stream. Early medieval land reclamation also noted, possibly for the construction of the Greyfriars
- *Evaluation, Westgate Centre, 2007-2008 (UAD 1755)*: 13th-14th century land reclamation extending southwards from the second terrace was also revealed. Further robbed and partially robbed walls associated with the Priory and its subsequent demolition were seen to cut this deposit(s), as was a possible western boundary to the Greyfriars complex, comprising a north-south aligned ditch, later superseded by a limestone wall. This latter appears to correspond to the boundary between the Priory complex and the area known as Paradise to the west. The remaining recorded deposits appeared to relate to the use of the area as gardens/pasture, and subsequently the construction of Victorian terraced housing and the demolition of same in the late 1960s.

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