

## STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 37

### AUSTIN FRIARS

#### Asset/Monument Type: Friary

**Summary:** The Austin friary was established to the north of the walled town in 1268. It was maintained until the Dissolution in 1540 when it passed into private hands, eventually becoming the founding site of Wadham College in 1610. The extent of the friary is uncertain, nothing survives above ground and it would appear that the site was almost entirely demolished in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and converted to tenement plots. A remnant structure was recorded at the college in the 1970s prior to demolition.

**Location (NGR):** SP51580658

**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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.*

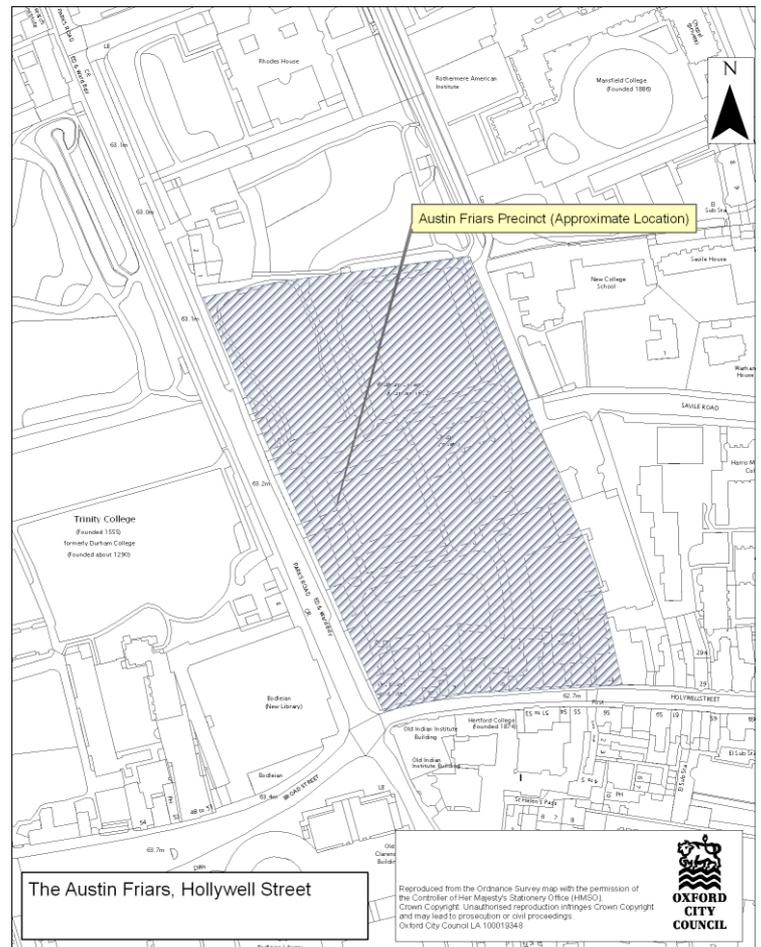
1. **Period:** Does the asset characterise a category or historic period?

**Assessment:** The friary was occupied for over 270 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



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substantial extant remains. The Austin Friars had a maximum of 39 houses in England. (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:** High

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

**Assessment:** Limited documentation on the Austin friary survives, although documentation for Wadham College is more extensive, cartographic information often provides the best source of documentation. There is a low level of archaeological documentation.

**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:** The friary is associated with contemporary institutions, with the post-medieval Wadham College and medieval extramural settlement north of the city

**Score:** Medium

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

**Assessment:** No surviving above ground buildings although some elements of 16<sup>th</sup> century architecture appears to have been incorporated within the post-medieval college. The character and extent of below ground remains is poorly understood.

**Score:** Low

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

**Assessment:** Vulnerable to small scale works, permitted development and pressure to improve on site facilities.

**Score:** Medium

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

**Assessment:** The site is now occupied by Wadham College, no evidence of the friary appears to have survived above ground and the range of features present is not well understood.

**Score:** Medium

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

**Assessment:** There is significant potential for previously unrecorded evidence.

**Score:** Medium

Overall score (15/24)

## **Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: Medium**

### **HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION**

The House of Austin Friars was founded in around 1268 in Holywell suburb opposite the Smithgate on Catte Street. Little is known about the friary although it appears to have comprised a quadrangle with a church on the south side and the refectory to the north (Blair 1976, 161). At the Dissolution it was leased to Henry Grey, duke of Suffolk but eventually sold to the City. Many of the monastic buildings were destroyed by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and by 1610 the plot had been divided into 16 tenements (*ibid*). After exchanging hands several times it eventually formed part of the foundation of Wadham College (Page 1907: 148).

Several burials have been recorded to the south and east of the main quadrangle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a further two burials were recorded during construction of the new library to the

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north east in 1972 (Blair 1976: 163). Elements of a 16<sup>th</sup> century monastic structure were incorporated into an stone outbuilding recorded in 1972-4 prior to demolition (*ibid*: 167). A limited investigation to the rear of Holywell Street in 1967 did not record any significant remains, no further details were available (UAD 218). In 1972-4 a series of watching briefs during the construction of the JCR Quad recorded two inhumations and some post medieval construction debris (Anon 1973: 381). Evidence of a late medieval outbuilding associated with the friary was recorded to the east of the site, built some time at the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was demolished around the time of the Dissolution and replaced with an outbuilding attached to the College (Blair 1976: 167). Further investigations in 1989 recorded evidence of the original college eastern boundary wall (UAD 498). The evidence suggested the foundations were at least 3.5m deep and typical of medieval construction, 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery was also recorded during the investigation.

Agas' map of 1578 records several large fields and orchards and a small formal garden to the rear of the surviving friary structures. A small number of buildings are recorded in a single plot on the corner of Holywell Street and Parks Road including a single storey range along Parks Road and a group of three two storey buildings on the site of the present King's Arms Hotel.

### **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**

- To what extent does archaeological evidence for pre friary occupation survive? What can they tell us about the development of suburban activity prior to the arrival of the friary
- Research into the archives of the Duke of Suffolk, can this provide any further details on the friary in the immediate post Dissolution phase?
- Can the plan and layout of the friary and its associated gardens and outbuildings be established?
- 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?
- 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?

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## Associated Monuments

UAD Monument 124: Wadham College. University College  
UAD Monument 268: Wadham Cottage. 17<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 269: Kings Arms Hotel. 17<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 270: 36 Holywell Street. 17<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 271: 35 Holywell Street. 17<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 397: Austin Friary. Medieval  
UAD Monument 549: Market Garden. Wadham College 18<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 572: Holywell Music Room, Holywell Street 18<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 611: Historic buildings, Holywell Street. North side  
UAD Monument 680: Wadham College gardens. 17<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 711: Holywell Street. 16<sup>th</sup> century  
UAD Monument 724: Parks Road. Medieval  
UAD Monument 764: Romano-British settlement, University Science Area

## Associated Events

- *Find in 1872 (UAD 1140)*: Part of an ornamented terra-cotta object, with traces of gilding
- *Observations in 1889 (UAD 772)*: A tiled pavement was found at about 1 m depth
- *Observations in 1892 (UAD 1251)*: A jug was found.
- *Finds in 1892 (UAD 1300)*: Professor Rolleston acquired a skull from the area north of Wadham College Garden Wall. He quotes 'Museum Road', but must have meant the road to the museum from the Wadham detail. A Roman vase from Wadham Garden is now thought to be Saxon.
- *Finds (UAD 1555)*: Hurst records that two skeletons were found by a large tree on the lawn in the area south of the quadrangle. He suggests they may have come from the Austin Friars cemetery
- *Observations in 1951 (UAD 154)*: Early 17<sup>th</sup> century walls and buildings had been built on made up ground over the gravel and the fill of an old gravel pit.
- *Excavations in 1967-8 (UAD 218)*: Work was carried out to uncover part of the Austin Friars cemetery. No further information
- *Building survey in 1968 (UAD 898)*: Wall paintings were found in a ground floor room on the south side of the main quad. The earlier, probably from 1612-3 when the building was constructed, seems to have been a pale blue and white decoration. The later work, dated 1659 by the window, is darker with much green and black paint
- *Excavations in 1972 (UAD 261)*: Evidence for demolition of Austin Friars after the Dissolution was seen. Two burials were also found
- *Excavations in 1974 (UAD 277)*: A trial trench was dug at the location of a stagger and thinning in the partly demolished boundary wall of the College. Quoins had been built at either side at that point. The excavation found a robber trench from a wall at right angles to the boundary. Later work suggested that this had been the north wall of a late medieval building
- *Excavations in 1975-6 (UAD 276)*: The east face of the rubble-walled outbuilding was incorporated into the boundary wall. Work in 1974 had found the robber trench of another wall to the north. Most of the building is modern, although the east wall and some other features date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Excavations revealed the footings of an earlier structure and the remains of a robbed out floor. Floor tile and painted window glass

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suggested a late medieval date. The site had been used by the Austin Friars. It would appear that an ancillary monastic building had been built against the east wall of the Friary. After the Dissolution the building was demolished, but later Wadham College erected a service building using some original foundations

- *Building work in 1981 (UAD 773)*: The 18th century shelves and fittings and some wall plaster were removed from the library when it was converted into a fellows common room. No recording was carried out of the fittings, but the outlines left showed reading desks rather than the later stalls. The roof was constructed in 1612 using 13th century carpentry techniques of trussed rafters with no longitudinal support. The walls are unusually thick, possibly to accommodate the flues of the kitchen beneath
- *Building Survey in 1981 (UAD 815)*: The Music Room opened in 1742. No details of the survey are available.
- *Building Survey in 1985 (UAD 890)*: The early 17th century timber roof consists of six bays of hammer beam type. Loose timbers and badly fitting joints suggested the use of unseasoned timbers. When fillets between the truss and west wall were removed rubbish was uncovered including a number of leather covered and string balls of various sizes
- *Watching Brief in 1982 (UAD 566)*: An undated patch of gravel was found below the SW door.
- *Building Survey in 1985 (UAD 771)*: The roof of the Hall was recorded prior to repair work
- *Watching Brief in 1989 (UAD 498)*: The foundations of its western wall went at least 3.5 m deep and 13th century pottery was built. This suggests the wall may have belonged to a bigger building to the west as well. The eastern wall was typical of the Austin Friary which predated the college, and contained windows. Below the building was a 19th century stone-lined cess pit with brick vault
- *Watching Brief in 1991 (UAD 508)*: A brick lined cess pit was found below a blocked doorway in the east wall. To the south foundations from earlier buildings were uncovered. Alongside the east wall was a well with water at 4.6 m. Compacted gravel surfaces were found cutting into layers of loam. Below this was a layer of ash from which medieval pottery was recovered.
- *Finds in 1994 (UAD 911)*: A glass phial and an onion-shaped wine bottle, both 17th century
- *Building Survey in 1997 (UAD 447)*: Evidence for the previous layout of rooms in the 17<sup>th</sup> century structure were recorded. A fireplace was exposed in the JCR and above the hearth were remains of wall paintings
- *Watching Brief in 2000 (UAD 552)*: No archaeological finds or features were recorded.

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