

STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 38

CRUTCHED FRIARS

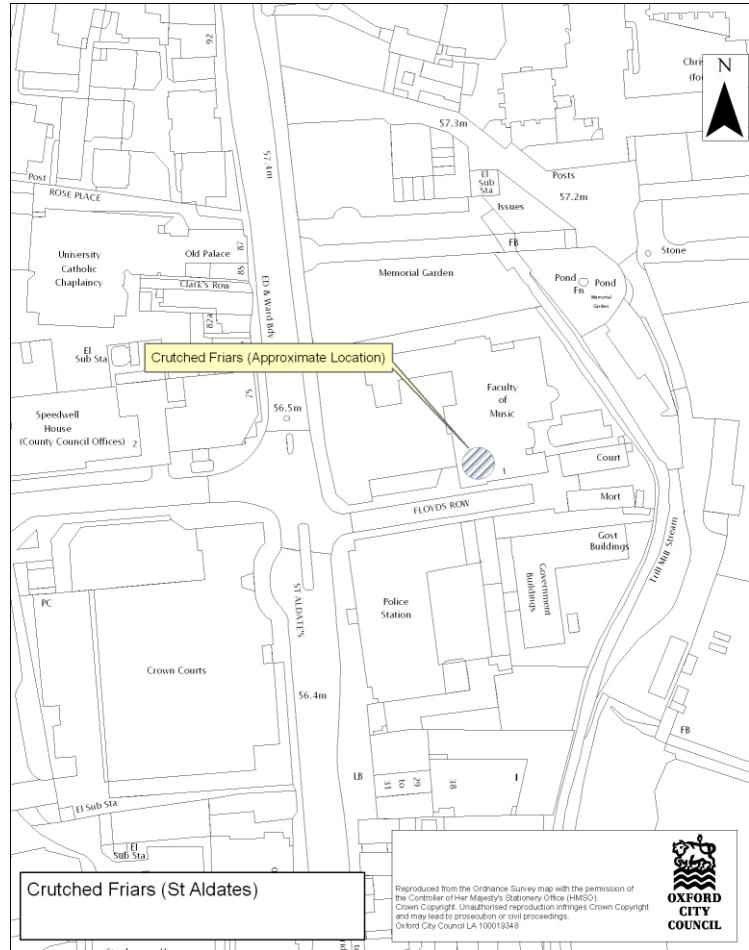
Asset/Monument Type: Friary

Summary: The Crutched friars arrived in Oxford in 1343 but had disappeared by the end of the century. Little is known about the friary. There is little documentary or archaeological evidence and given the short period of time they settled in Oxford it is possible they did not fully plan and execute the building of a friary precinct. The location of the friary is thought to be on St Aldates near the South gate.

Location (NGR): SP51460580

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 less than 55 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. In addition to the major orders of friars there were 9 houses of Crutched Friars (Knowles and Hadcock 1953; Butler 1984). 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)(EH Monument Class Descriptions).

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

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: No surviving above ground features. The friary was one of several in the town.

Score: Low

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

Assessment: No known structures from the friary survive

Score: Low

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

Assessment: No specific 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 the range and character of features present.

Score: Low

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

Assessment: The friars are thought to have been based along St Aldates, however this is not definitively certain, it is clear that they were not allowed to establish a foothold in the city. Archaeological investigations in the area have so far failed to identify any remains of the friary

Score: Low-Medium

Overall score (10.5/24)

Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: low- uncertain

HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

By the end of the Roman period a series of islands had been created within the reed swamp that covered much of the floodplain to the south of St Aldates (Dodd ed. 2003: 14) and there is some evidence for a crossing or series of crossings over the floodplain along this line in the mid Saxon period replacing an earlier fording point (*ibid.*: 15). Evidence for land reclamation and land use in the form of wattle fencing and possible clay dumps along St Aldates in the Saxon period has been recorded on a number of sites and a good summary has been provided in Dodd (ed. 2003). The purpose of the many wattle fences recorded around St Aldates are uncertain and there may have been several functions. At 79-80 St Aldates a series of wattle fences were inserted short distances apart and leading down the slope of the bank possibly with the purpose of trapping silt and preventing erosion thus strengthening the causeway (Durham 1977, 182). Dating of the wattle fencing indicate an 8th to 9th century date, pottery evidence suggests a date of the 8th-9th century while three radiocarbon dates from one fence provided a mid 9th century date (Blair 1994, 91).

The House of Crutched Friars was established in 1343 on a site near the South Gate of Oxford, probably at Broadgates Hall or Plomerhall although they also held property at East Gate at Merton College. The friars were relatively short lived however and by the mid 15th century they appear to have left Oxford (Page 1907: 149).

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 further evidence for Middle and Late Saxon activity adjacent to the river crossing be identified. What was the character and extent of domestic, commercial and manufacturing activity? Can the middle Saxon activity be more closely dated and sequenced?
- How can environmental analysis of samples improve our understanding of the area? Evidence for past climatic changes, palaeo-environmental evidence, palaeo-channels and watercourses, land reclamation in the Saxon to medieval period
- Is it possible to identify any features in the area datable to the second half of the 14th century and thus contemporary with the friary and if so 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?
- 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 399: Friary of the Crutched Friars

UAD Monument 585: Trill Mill Stream

UAD Monument 751: The Rakke. Pathway

Associated Events

- *Excavations in 1981 UAD 335):* Sequence of stone river walls recorded, the earliest dating to the 13th century.
- *Excavations in 1987-8 UAD 1536):* The north edge of the 12th century Trill Mill Stream was exposed. This had been revetted with stakes and planks, the latter forming a sluice for an outfall ditch.

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
- Crossley, A, et al. 1979 *A History of the county of Oxford: Volume 4*. London: Victoria County History
- Knowles, D, & Hadcock, R, 1971 *Medieval Religious houses of England and Wales*. London: Longman