EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITE OF THE DUTCH CHURCH, AUSTIN FRIARS, IN THE CITY OF LONDON

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SUMMARY

During 1950-1 the late Professor Grimes directed the excavation of the interior of the ruined Dutch Church or Jesus Temple of Austin Friars (TQ 3293 8136), which had been destroyed by bombing in 1940. The earliest Romano-British features were gravel pits, which were infilled during the mid 2nd century. The area was then divided by a series of linear gullies, interpreted as property boundaries. Later the ground level was raised by soil dumping and than a series of mud brick or cob walled buildings were constructed during the late 2nd or early 3rd century. These buildings were later demolished and others erected during the late 3rd or 4th century. The site was then sealed by a build up of dark earth deposits. The earliest post-Roman activity was the digging of rubbish pits, which began during the Saxo-Norman period. From C.1253 the nave of the Augustinian priory church occupied the site. The foundations of the south arcade of the nave consisted of a series of masonry pier bases. Under 'Synthesis' below the results of the 1950-1 excavations are linked to more recent archaeological work in the Austin Friars area.

INTRODUCTION

The excavation of the Dutch Church of Austin Friars was one of the many archaeological investigations directed by the late Professor Grimes on bomb sites within the City of London in advance of redevelopment between 1946–1968 (Fig 1). From July 1950 to spring 1951 six areas

within the ruined church were excavated. The original intention was to excavate the entire nave in a series of eight trenches each measuring some 28ft (8.5m) by 32ft (9.6m). Each trench was to be separated by a baulk 3ft (0.9m) wide (Fig 2). Due to a lack of time, resources, room to dump the spoil and bad weather work was largely restricted to Areas 1 to 4 within the southern half of the church; only the south-west (Area 4) trench was fully excavated. Very limited work was undertaken in the northern half of the church (Areas 5 and 6).1

In the upper portion of the trenches, the extent of individual features or deposits could not be determined, so each area was subdivided into 15 squares and dug in 6in (0.15m) or 1ft (0.30m) thick spits. Many of the intrusive pits were only defined at depth, so the spits contained

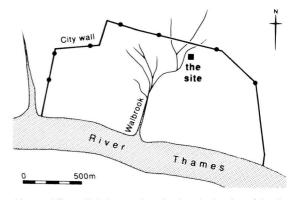


Fig 1. The walled Roman city, showing the location of the site

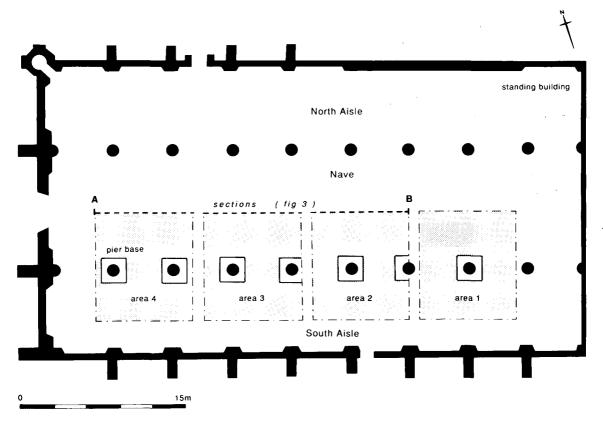


Fig 2. The location of the excavations within the Dutch Church (the extent of Fig 3. is indicated by the letters A and B)

much intrusive material. Before the excavation started in 1950 some 7ft (2.1m) of post-medieval graves, brick burial vaults and modern deposits within the ruined church were cleared down to c.11.3m OD. During the rebuilding of the church it was proposed to reduce the ground level a further 3m clearing the site of all archaeological deposits.

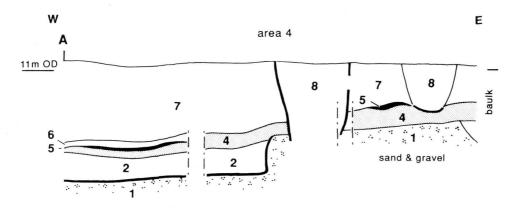
An interim report on the site was included in Grimes's volume on his London work (1968, 124–127). This excavation is referred to as site WFG 50 in the Grimes Archive (held by the Museum of London). Unfortunately some of the finds have been mislaid since the 1950s so the dating evidence for some phases of Romano-British activity is limited. This report is a summary of the full stratigraphic archive report on the excavation (Watson 1996).

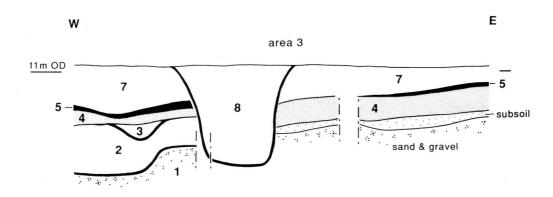
Phase one: site topography and geology

The natural ground surface of this area slopes from east to west, towards a deep tributary of the Walbrook stream (Fig 1).² Untruncated Pleistocene sand and gravel was located in the western part of Area 4 at 10.0m OD, while further east in Areas 2 and 3 it was located at 10.3m OD. Natural brickearth overlying the gravel was located in the southern part of Area 4 at 10.1m OD (Fig 3). In many places the natural deposits had been truncated by quarrying. In several places undated disturbed subsoils or redeposited gravels and brickearth were located directly above natural deposits.

Phase two: quarry pits

Two quarry pits were dug for the extraction of gravel (Fig 3). The backfills of the larger pit can be divided into two types. First, clayey brickearth and second, gravel or gravelly loam. Grimes (1968, 125) suggested that this feature was a sunken-floored hut and interpreted the brickearth as makeup for successive gravel floors. The thin gravel fills which all sloped down towards the centre of the feature look more like eroded





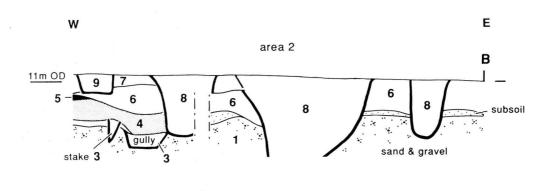




Fig 3. South facing sections of Areas 2, 3 and 4. The numbers 1 to 9 refer to the site phasing

material derived from the sides of the pit than floors. Perhaps the pit was intermittently infilled with brickearth stripped from neighbouring sites before gravel quarrying took place. The infilling of this pit is dated to AD 120–160, suggesting that the quarrying had taken place during the late 1st or early 2nd century AD.³

The smaller gravel pit had a basal fill of dark brown organic silt, sealed by dumps of buff loam, gravel, mortar and wall plaster.

Phase three: land allotment

Across the infilled gravel pits a series of five linear gullies aligned north-south were laid out (Fig 3). A sixth feature may be part of a small pit or an east-west gully. Associated with one of these gullies were nine stakeholes, which may represent fence lines flanking the gully. These gullies are interpreted as a period of land allotment, probably marking out building plots before the area was developed during the mid to late 2nd century.

Phase four: soil dumping

The infilled linear gullies were sealed by the dumping of 0.3 to 0.5m of gravelly soil (Fig 3). These undated dumps are interpreted as the raising and levelling of the area before the first phase of building. A wire brooch of 2nd-century date was found within these deposits.

Phase five: earlier buildings

Across the western part of Area 4 were two areas of gravel flooring, at the same level was a concentration of collapsed or dumped wall plaster fragments. Further east were small areas of yellow clay, gravel and mortar flooring (Fig 3). These buildings were only represented by fragmentary areas of flooring, any associated walls were apparently destroyed by later buildings (Phase six) or the density of medieval pits (Phase eight).

Grimes (1968, 126) noted that there were 'quantities of wall plaster, sometimes in concentrated patches, the most definite covering an area about 12ft (3.6m) across' and interpreted as the collapsed plaster facing from a cob (clay lump) or mud brick walled building. Other plaster

concentrations were found within layers of brickearth, interpreted as the remains of cob or mud brick walled buildings. In one place an area of *in situ* 'plaster floor' (2.5cm thick) retained a short length 'of quarter-round moulding, above which in turn projected the broken edge of a vertical surface, obviously the facing of the wall. Of the wall itself, however, there was no trace: it had no foundation trench' (Grimes 1968, 126). This observation suggests that the associated wall was founded on a timber baseplate, which was robbed out when the building was demolished.

There are no finds to date the construction of these buildings, but on stratigraphic grounds they were erected during the late 2nd or early 3rd century.

Phase six: later buildings

The construction of the later phase of buildings was preceded by the dumping of c.o.3m depth of clayey brickearth, interpreted by Grimes (1968, 126) as the demolished walls of the earlier cob or mud brick buildings (Fig 3). Finds from this deposit date to AD 120–250. The brickearth dumps were sealed by a yellow clay floor, which in turn was sealed by a build up of organic rubbish dating to AD 240–400. Above this deposit was an undated stony level, probably another floor surface, which was covered by a dark earth deposit (Phase seven).

One area of earlier building flooring (Phase five) was sealed by dumps of mortar and loamy soil, dated to AD 120-160 (purely residual finds). These dumps were sealed by 0.3m of gravel and mortar, interpreted as makeup for a clay floor.

The remains of these buildings were limited to fragments of flooring, no wall-lines survived, so the plan or even the number of buildings on the site is not known. The presence of one external area is indicated by the dumping of gravel and soil (described earlier), which was later built over.

The various fragments of later buildings are of late 3rd and 4th-century date, no more precise dating is possible from such limited evidence. However, a coin of Constantine (AD 306-337), found in a post-Roman context, suggests that the site was still occupied during the early 4th century.

Phase seven: dark earth build up

The later phase of Romano-British buildings (Phase six) was sealed by a depth of 0.6 to 1.5m

of 'dark fairly stiff loam, gravelly in places, but quite without stratification or other features' (Grimes 1968, 127; Fig 3). This deposit is interpreted as a dark earth deposit (discussed below).

The dark earth was dug in spits 15 or 30cm thick on a grid system within each trench. A number of the contexts assigned to these spits contain medieval finds, presumably due to undetected intrusive features (Blackmore 1992). Romano-British pottery was found in eight spit contexts, of these contexts, five date to AD 270-400 and a sixth to AD 250-400. These dates suggest that either the accumulation of the dark earth deposit began during the 4th century or that some 4th- century deposits have been destroyed by biological reworking (root/worm action).

Phase eight: medieval rubbish pits

Within Areas 1 to 4, eight rubbish pits were excavated. Most were backfilled with 'black soil' derived from decayed organic rubbish (Fig 3). Several pits contained thin bands of clay, probably laid down to seal the smelly, decaying, organic rubbish. The dating evidence for these pits is limited as the upper portion of most pits was dug out as part of the dark earth spits (Phase seven) and the features were only defined at the top of the surviving Romano-British deposits. It is probable that the 13th and 14th-century pottery from the dark earth spits was derived from these pits or later features. The earliest medieval pottery from Areas 1 to 4 is of 12thcentury date. Limited exavation of several pits within Area 6 produced Saxo-Norman pottery (1050-1150), a pricket candlestick and 13thcentury pottery (Blackmore 1992).

It appears that before the establishment of the Augustinian priory in 1253 (Phase nine) the site was an external area used for the disposal of rubbish. No trace of associated medieval buildings or other featues such as wells were found.

Phase nine: the Augustinian priory church

It is documented that the Augustinian priory was founded in 1253 (Wheatley 1956, 160). It consisted of a large church (nave and choir) with cloisters and domestic buildings to the north (Fig 4). The excavated area occupied part of the

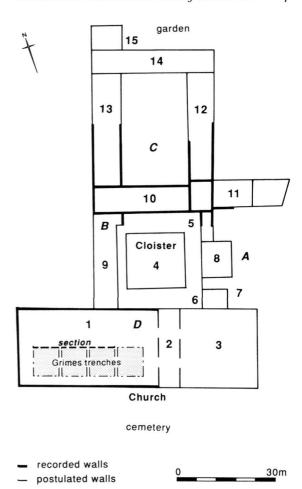


Fig 4. The postulated layout of the London Augustinian priory, showing the location of relevant archaeological investigations (after Cater 1915, 205)

KEY TO PRIORY BUILDINGS: 1. Nave, site of later Dutch church; 2. Cross-aisles; 3. Choir; 4. Cloister garth (courtyard); 6. Little Dorter (above cloister walk?); 7. Little Chapterhouse; 8. Great Chapterhouse; 9. Hall, with dorter above; 10. Library; 11. Kitchens and bakehouse; 12. Refectory; 13. Hall and guesthouse; 14. Probable site of Prior's lodgings; 15. Possible site of infirmary

KEY TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS: A) Eastern side of Austin Friar's Square (address unknown) 1888 and 111-5 Old Broad Street, 1994 and 1995; B) 10 Austin Friars Square, 1895; C) Pinner's Hall, 105-8 Old Broad Street and 8 Austin Friars Square 1912 and 1989-90; D) Interior of the Dutch church 1950-1

nave and south aisle of the church. The south arcade foundations were represented by eight rectangular, trench-built, chalk rubble pier bases (Fig 2). Similar foundations existed for the unexcavated north arcade (Grimes 1968, 125). These regularly spaced foundations appear to represent only one phase of construction, which related to the mid 14th-century standing building, interpreted as the result of the 1354 rebuilding (RCHM 1929, 32–33). As there was no sign of earlier foundations or robbed out foundations, it must be assumed that the original 13th-century nave was of either the same or a very similar plan to that of the mid 14th-century rebuild, allowing the reuse of all the original pier bases.

Inside the nave were a number of post-medieval burial vaults and many monuments of 15th to 18th-century date (RCHM 1929, 33–34). All the burial vaults and graves within the church were cleared before the excavation began in 1950. During the excavation only the basal portions of three empty graves or modern features were recorded (Fig 4). The level of the post-medieval church floor is estimated to have been c.13.4m OD.

SYNTHESIS

The Romano-British period

The earliest Romano-British activity on the site was gravel quarrying, the two pits were infilled by the mid 2nd century (Phase two). Only one of the quarry pit fills consisted of a dump of plaster or mortar and no fills can be interpreted as domestic rubbish—implying that there was little human habitation close by.

Why a flood-free site on the eastern edge of the Upper Walbrook Valley was not developed during the late 1st and early 2nd century when the City was rapidly expanding is worth considering (Perring 1991, 23–37). One possibility is that this area of valley flank was not considered worth settling until a lot of the lower lying valley land was drained and reclaimed during the period c.AD 90-120. This period of reclamation appears to have served partly as preparation for a phase of building construction within the Upper Walbrook Valley during the early 2nd century (Maloney 1990, 119–120). Another possibility is that this marginal area was being quarried until the mid 2nd century, to save bringing gravel from further afield. Construction projects such as the second basilica (built ϵ .AD 100-130), only 200 metres south of the site, would have required vast amounts of sand and gravel. Presumably this demand would have

encouraged the quarrying of any nearby vacant area. Yet this area was clearly both settled and valued during the early 3rd century (discussed below) as it was included within the City walls (built ϵ .AD 200–225).

After the infilling of the quarry pits a series of north-south linear gullies were dug (Phase three). Associated with one gully were two probable fence lines. These gullies are interpreted as a late and-century phase of land allotment, marking out building plots. Similar linear gullies have been found on several sites within the walled city. At Rangoon Street there were a series of early Roman linear ditches, probably defining small fields or animal pens, which were infilled and abandoned during the late 2nd century then sealed by a build up of dark earth. Interestingly this site never appears to have been built over during the Romano-British period (Bowler 1983). At Leadenhall Court, on the site of the second Roman basilica, a series of linear gullies of mid 1st-century date represent enclosures and property boundaries (Milne 1992, 10–11). The infilled gullies were sealed by soil dumps presumably to raise and level the area before building began (Phase 4).

The earlier phase of building is dated to the late 2nd or early 3rd century, the buildings consisted of a small area of clay, gravel and plaster/mortar floor. The actual walls were of cob or mud brick construction, with evidence of collapsed sheets of plaster or external mortar render. One fragment of mortar floor was associated with a quarter round moulding at the junction of the wall and floor.

The earlier phase of building is broadly contemporary with the two, late 2nd or 3rd-century stone-built houses, containing tessellated floors and painted plaster walls, found to the west of the site at 22–25 Austin Friars in 1989 (Dunlop and Shotliff 1989; Milne 1995, 75).

After the demolition of the earlier buildings, the resulting debris was used to level up the site and another phase of buildings of late 3rd to 4th-century date were erected (Phase five). Again the evidence of these buildings was limited to small areas of flooring.

The later buildings were sealed by a thick layer of dark earth. This deposit is now interpreted as soil build up of complex origin, which began during the late Roman period and appears to have continued until the late Anglo-Saxon reoccupation of the walled City. It is probable that the dark earth represents a

combination of biological reworking of the latest Roman deposits and natural soil build up on unoccupied or waste land (Courty et al 1989, 261–268; Macphail 1993; Yule 1990). Previously dark earth deposits have been interpreted as the result of gardens or farmland created on the sites of former buildings within the declining and sparsely populated late Roman city (Perring 1991, 78–80).

The Augustinian priory

The earliest medieval activity was the digging of rubbish pits which started in the Saxo-Norman period (1050–1150) and presumably continued until 1253.

The Order of Friars Hermit of St Augustine commonly known as Austin Friars—was formally instituted in 1256 by an ordinance of Pope Alexander IV. This new mendicant order had developed from the unification of a number of small Austin hermit communities (Lawrence 1984, 217). The title 'Austin' signifies that these friars followed the monastic rule of St Augustine. In the 13th century the mendicant friars represented a radical breakaway from the monastic tradition of seclusion. Instead they saw their mission as preaching and ministering to the ever expanding urban population, whom the friars sought to live amongst (Lawrence 1984, 192-195, 207). The first Augustinian priory in England was founded at Clare in Suffolk in 1248-9 and their second priory was founded in the City of London during 1253 by Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex. In 1334 and 1345 the London priory was enlarged by new land-grants and was 're-edified' during 1354-55 (Hugo 1864, 11-13; Wheatley 1956, 160).

The medieval monastic orders, like modern financial houses, all sought to have a large London branch to represent their interests in the capital and at court. Therefore the London priory was much larger than most of their houses. Hence the cathedral-like proportions of the church: the nave of which was 153ft (46.7m) long; for comparison the nave of the present St Paul's cathedral is 188ft (57.3m) long (RCHM 1929, 32, 44). The nave of London Blackfriars was only seven bays and 114ft (34.8m) long and the nave of London Greyfriars was also only seven bays and 132ft (40.2m) long (Clapham 1912, 64).

The church consisted of a large nave of nine bays separated from the choir by a cross-passage, above which was 'a most fine spired steeple, small high and straight' which was rebuilt in 1362 (Wheatley 1956, 159-160).4 The appearance of the rebuilt nave is illustrated in a late 18th-century watercolour (Schofield fig 63). Within the church were chapels dedicated to St Thomas and St John (Hugo 1864, 6). The location of these chapels is uncertain. A 16thcentury Harleian manuscript catalogue of burials within the priory lists many aristocratic or rich interments. The places of burial are listed as the nave, choir, 'the walking place by the choir' (the cross-passage), the chapels of St Thomas and St John, the 'east' and 'west wings' of the church (presumably chapels of unknown dedication), plus the chapterhouse (Hugo 1864, 5-8). Stow writing in c.1600 obviously obtained his list of interments from the same manuscript (Wheatley 1956, 160-161). The main cemetery lay to the south of the church (Fig 4). Redevelopment of this area in 1910 revealed no sign of burials (Norman 1916, 9) and archaeological investigation of this site in 1987 also revealed no sign of the cemetery, probably due to the truncation caused by construction of deep basements in 1910 (Beazley 1988).

The area of the excavation lay within part of the nave and south aisle of the priory church, the foundations of the south arcade were represented by rubble-built pierbases. These bases appear to have been part of the original 13th-century church, but were reused in the mid 14th century rebuild (RCHM 1929, 2–33). The external foundations and buttresses of the south nave wall were revealed during the redevelopment of the adjoining property in 1910. The presence of two partly blocked medieval windows in the south aisle wall suggest the existence of a medieval building, possibly a chapel entered from the south aisle, built up against the south wall of the church (Norman 1916, 7–9).

To the north of the church stood the priory cloisters (Fig 4). The approximate extent of the cloister garth is still preserved as open space by Austin Friars Square (Cater 1915, 214; RCHM 1929, 33). Grouped around or to the north of the cloisters were the various residential and service buildings (Fig 4). The quadrangular layout of the priory buildings suggest the existence of two sets of cloisters.⁵ The excavation of Leicester Austin Friars revealed two sets of cloisters on the north side of the church. The first set of cloisters

dated from the 13th century and the second set was added during the 14th century (Mellor and Pearce 1981, 9–41). The most northerly part of the priory precinct fronting onto London Wall was garden. Disputes concerning the walls and ditches around the 'prior's garden' were heard by the London Assize of Nuisance in 1313 and 1328 (Chew and Kellaway 1973, 39,67).

Various fragments of the priory buildings have been recorded during redevelopment or, more recently, during archaeological investigations of the area (Fig 4). In 1888 redevelopment of the eastern side of Austin Friars Square on the site of the Great and Little Chapterhouse revealed a number of burials (Cater 1912, 29). It has been suggested that these burials lay within a cemetery to the north of the choir (Cater 1915, 218). However, this area is not documented as a cemetery, so it seems more probable that these burials either lay within one of the chapterhouses or the north side of the choir. An evaluation of the site of the chapterhouses and choir during 1994 revealed truncated chalk rubble wall foundations, interpreted as part of the Little Chapterhouse and a substantial fragment of L-shaped foundations aligned east-west, with a north-south return in Testpit 4A (Thomas 1994). The foundations in Testpit 4A are provisionally interpreted as part of the north wall of the choir with an attached external buttress (the northsouth return). In an attempt to clarify the situtation in Testpit 4A a further evaluation (Testpit 4B) was undertaken during 1995. This work confirmed the full width of the east-west foundation (1.24m) (Hardy 1995).

A fragment of the western arm of the cloisters was revealed during 1895, when the house at 10 Austin Friars was demolished. A 14th-century door (c.3.9m high and over 2.3m wide), plus several ceiling bosses and various fragments of groined vault rib were discovered (Cater 1915, 216–217; Norman 1916, 10).

When Pinners Hall was built in 1912 large portions of the foundations of the hall or guesthouse, refectory, kitchens, bakehouses and library were recorded (Cater 1912, 27–31). Sadly re-examination of this site in 1989–90 revealed little trace of the priory foundations (Greatorex and Watson 1989; Rosborough 1990).

The priory closed in November 1539. In 1541 Sir William Powlett (later Marquis of Winchester) acquired some of the domestic buildings and in 1550 he acquired the church choir (Hugo 1864, 15). By c.1560 Powlett had built a large residence,

surrounded by formal gardens, known as Winchester House on the site of many of the priory buildings.6 Powlett's new residence was one of a number of 'urban palaces' erected between c.1532-1570 within the recently closed City of London monastic precincts (Schofield 1993b, 29, 33). Fragments of 'Tudor' brick foundations including a number of four-centred relieving arches were recorded at Pinners Hall during the 1912 redevelopment (Cater 1912, 30, site plan). These foundations are interpreted as fragments of the southern part of Powlett's residence or its outbuildings. One brick wall was built directly over the western wall of the hall and guesthouse, suggesting that a number of priory foundations and possibly standing fabric were retained within the new residence. In 1580 part of the priory buildings, probably the kitchens or bakehouse became a 'glasshouse', manufacturing Venetian glass (Cater 1915, 215).

After the dissolution the church was left standing. In 1545 it was converted to warehousing and subsequently used as a naval storehouse (Hugo 1864, 15-17; Cater 1915, 228-229). In June 1550 the nave was granted by King Edward VI to the Dutch protestants as their preaching place. In July 1550 the King granted the rest of the church—the choir, the cross-aisles and chapels—to Sir William Powlett. In July 1551, by letters patent, the nave was granted to a congregration of Walloons led by Johnanes a Lasco, as their temple of Jesus (Hugo 1864, 15-17). In July 1553 after the accession of Queen Mary, the Dutch protestants were ordered to leave the country. In February 1560 the church was restored to the Dutch by Queen Elizabeth. In 1571 the cross-aisles of the church were being used for grain storage and the choir was a coal store (Hugo 1864, 16). By 1603 the steeple and choir were derelict and were demolished by the Marquis of Winchester—who refused to repair them despite public protest (Hugo 1864, 18). Stow noted in c.1600 that the church was entered via a south gate, which lead into the cemetery, while the actual church was entered by a west porch. He described it as a large church with a 'fine spired steeple' (Wheatley 1956, 159).

The Dutch church escaped destruction in the Great Fire of 1666, only to be gutted by fire in 1862, then restored in 1863–4. During the night of 15–16th October 1940 the church was destroyed by bombing. The present church was built during 1950–54.7

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NOTES

- ¹ Areas 5 and 6 are not shown on any plan and therefore not included on Fig 2.
- ² The course of this infilled stream channel was plotted in 1940 under Great Winchester Street, see Gould 1951, and later at Winchester House in 1963, see Marsden 1967, 208–209. More recently this channel has been examined locally at 22–25 Austin Friars, see Dunlop and Shotliff 1989.
- ³ All the Romano-British dating evidence cited is taken from the pottery spot-dating by Jo Groves, see WFG50 archive for details.
- ⁴ This area is described in a grant of 1550 as a crossaisle, see Hugo 1864,15. This archaic term normally means transepts, but in this case it must refer to internal divisions as the church had no transepts.
- ⁵ The set of cloisters adjoining the church are described in a grant of 1546 as 'the principal cloister', see Cater 1915, 213–214.
- ⁶ Powlett's house can be clearly seen on the London copperplate map of c.1559, see Fisher 1981. During the 1963 redevelopment of Winchester House (GM193) no evidence of either Powlett's house or the priory buildings were recorded, possibly due to the depth of the existing cellars, see Marsden 1967, 208 and Schofield 1994, 93. However, a recent evaluation of the site revealed some archaeological deposits remain in situ, see Askew 1995.
- ⁷ The dates cited are taken from the 1986 editions of the church guide. The foundation stone of the new church was laid on 23th July 1950, but rebuilding appears not to have started until 1951.

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