

# THE LAYOUT OF THE GREYFRIARS BUILDINGS (see large plan)

WESTGATE  
OXFORD



Previous excavations in the 1960s/70s focused on the church, arguably the most impressive of the Greyfriars buildings, with only limited work conducted to the south to give a suggested layout of the buildings within this area.

Although much of the stone from the friary's walls, along with the decorated tiles and flagstones of the original floors, and ceramic and stone roof tiles, were taken for reuse elsewhere after Henry VIII's Reformation, we have still been able to develop a much clearer picture of the layout of this part of the Greyfriars precinct. Our current interpretation of the complex is set out below, and can be seen on the large aerial plan.

## Building Group 1 – The Main Cloister

These have only been partly revealed within the north-east corner of the excavations. The main cloisters were a set of buildings arranged on four sides of a central quadrangle, with the church along its northern side. Here would have been the chapter house (meeting hall for the friars), the libraries (unusually this friary had two), the scriptorium (writing room), and the sacristy (store for sacred objects). The western wall of the Cloister extends southwards and forms the western wall of Building Group 2 – the minor cloister.

## Building Group 2 – The Minor Cloister

Located immediately to the south of the main cloister was a second or minor cloister, again arranged around a central courtyard. On the northern side is the southern range of the main cloister, with a large foundation for a set of stone steps descending from its first floor into the courtyard. To the west was a long hall-like building leading to, over and beyond a stone-lined water channel. This is probably the sleeping quarters or dormitory, and wash house or reredorter (toilet block/latrines) for which the water channel provided an effective system for drainage and sewage. The southern range is a building whose 'hall-like' western end and smaller eastern end suggests an infirmary hall with attached chapel, this would be for the physical and spiritual care of the sick, injured and aged. The eastern range of the minor cloister (if it exists) lies beyond the excavated area.

## Building 3 – The Refectory or Eating Hall

West of, and adjacent to the dormitory and wash house (reredorter), and probably linked to it by a stone bridge over another stone water channel is a similar sized structure with buttressed walls. This is probably the refectory or eating hall, and was conveniently located directly south of the kitchen and servery. It is probably the last building to have been constructed, but also the longest surviving, as it is probably this building that survives the Dissolution and is shown on the 1592 Map by Agas.

## Building 4 – The Kitchen/Bakehouse

This building is set apart from the cloisters and refectory, probably to reduce the risk from accidental fire. The kitchen is the best preserved building that we uncovered, and one of the easiest to recognise. Within its stone walls there were a number of stone hearths set within the floor for roasting meats and heating pans. Along the southern

wall were two large stone ovens, probably for baking bread. The floors were thick with ash and charcoal from wood fires. The lack of buttresses on its walls probably indicate a lack of large windows, or upper floor. Inside would have been open to the roof rafters allowing smoke to escape through a 'louvre'. The other rooms to the immediate south and east of the kitchen probably represent the servery, store rooms for the dry goods, and the buttery (for storing barrels or butts of beer).

## The Stone-Lined Water Channels

The Greyfriars were masters at channelling and using existing water resources. Water from the Trill Mill Stream was diverted within well-built stone walled channels towards, through and then out of the reredorter. A bypass channel ran between the refectory and west range of the minor cloister taking water from this channel back to the stream and was controlled by a sluice gate which allowed the regulation of water through the reredorter.

## The Precinct Wall

Surrounding the entire complex of friary buildings, and separating them from their gardens, known as Paradise (now Paradise Square), to the west, and other lands to the south, was a massive stone foundation (measuring up to 1.8m wide) for the precinct wall. In places along the Trill Mill Stream it survived to over 2m high and was made from beautifully worked limestone blocks, possibly forming a quay for small boats just to the south of the minor cloister.

## Trill Mill Stream, the Possible Mill and Fishery

The Trill Mill Stream defined the southern extent of the friary buildings, with the large precinct wall. At the very eastern end of this wall, a stone floored channel and very well constructed limestone walling may indicate the position of a mill (whose position was beyond the limit of excavation).

On the south bank of the Trill Mill Stream stone walling was absent and the stream had earthen banks, with riverside trees. Opposite the south-west corner of the precinct wall was the opening for a large north-south channel whose banks were held in place by large timber structures. This was later modified with stone walls and a stone floor to the channel. Evidence for a timber structure within the channel was found, and this may represent an elaborate fishery for catching eels etc.