

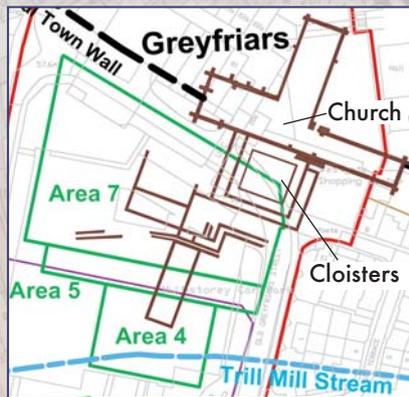
EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF THE WESTGATE CENTRE, 1967-1976: THE GREYFRIARS

WESTGATE
OXFORD



The preaching Order of Franciscans or Greyfriars was founded by St Francis in Pisa, Italy in 1210. St Francis sent friars to England in 1224 under Agnellus also of Pisa. It was Agnellus who founded the Greyfriars Friary in Oxford.

The Friary was established between St Ebbe's church and the city wall. The popularity of the friars as teachers within the university meant that they soon outgrew their original site. They extended their precinct south of the city wall and royal permission was given for the church itself to be built across the line of the wall.



The first archaeological excavations of Greyfriars were undertaken between 1967-1972, before the construction of the Westgate Shopping Centre. These uncovered the plan of the church and the different phases of its construction over a period of nearly 300 years from the 1240s. The church's eventual plan was T-shaped which provided the largest possible preaching area. Pieces of stained and painted glass, decorated floor tiles and a small statuette, presumably of a saint, were found, which give a glimpse of what the church might have looked like. Burials were found

under the floor of the church, but the body of Agnellus, who was later made a saint, was not identified. Other burials were excavated from the graveyard.

To the south of the church there was a cloister with a complex of other buildings to south of that - probably including the monks' sleeping quarters (dormitory or dormer), their wash-house (reredorter), the chapter house (a large meeting room), the sacristy, and possibly a watermill. Only a small part of these buildings was identified in the 1970s, but much more will be discovered in Area 7 of the current excavations.



Statuette of James the Greater

After the Reformation the buildings of Greyfriars were pulled down and many of its foundations were removed to provide building materials. This left only the ghost of the buildings in the ground. The site of the Greyfriars' gardens, known as Paradise, was then turned into famous market gardens. By the end of the nineteenth century the whole site of Greyfriars had been built over with streets of terraced housing, known as "The Friars".



View of the excavation