

Nominate a Heritage Asset

Site of the Franciscan Priory, Old Greyfriars Street



Left: Turn Again Lane lies on the site of the Greyfriars Priory of which several walls survives as the garden wall of Nos. 8-10 (© Bill Nichols reproduced under Creative Commons License)

Below: the garden of the St Ebbe's Rectory at Paradise Square marks part of the former area of the Paradise Garden, which became part of the Greyfriars Priory land after the Friars of the Sac were suppressed in the early 14th century.



1. WHAT IS IT? Is it one of the following?	Tick
<input type="checkbox"/> a building or group of buildings	
<input type="checkbox"/> a monument or site (an area of archaeological remains or a structure other than a building)	y
<input type="checkbox"/> a place (e.g. a street, park, garden or natural space)	
<input type="checkbox"/> a landscape (an area defined by visual features or character, e.g. a city centre, village, suburb or field system)	

Nominate a Heritage Asset

2. WHY IS IT INTERESTING? Is it interesting in any of the following ways?	Tick / Rank
Historic interest – a well documented association with a person, event, episode of history, or local industry	y
Archaeological interest – firm evidence of potential to reveal more about the human past through further study	y
Architectural interest – an example of an architectural style, a building of particular use, a technique of building, or use of materials	
Artistic interest – It includes artistic endeavour to communicate meaning or use of design (including landscape design) to enhance appearance	
<p>What is it about the asset that provides this interest?</p> <p>Historic interest: By the end of the 13th century Priors of the Friars of the Sac and the Franciscans (Greyfriars) occupied sites directly south of and crossing the line of the city walls, west of Littlegate and north of the Trill Mill Stream. The order first came to England in 1224 and a centre in Oxford (the country's academic capital) was established in the same year in St Ebbe's parish. Between the 1220s and 40s they developed the land between the city walls and Church Street. Land south of the former line of the city walls was added in 1244-5 when it had become successful in attracting patronage and scholars from across Europe. The church at this time included ten separate chapels and a highly unusual teaching or 'preaching nave'. The Friars of the Sack were suppressed in the late 13th century and their land taken up by Greyfriars Priory resulting in development of a large enclosed garden or 'paradise' in the north west of the area, giving the origin of the modern names Paradise Street and Paradise Square. Within the church numerous worthies were buried within the Priory including Agnellus and Roger Bacon, but also Richard Plantagenet, 1st Earl of Cornwall and King of the Romans (Germans).</p> <p>Archaeological interest: The Priors would have been substantial complexes of buildings, including chapels, cloisters, sleeping, dining and working accommodation for the Friars, as well as buildings to support the economy of these institutions and school buildings (that at Greyfriars is recorded as the largest of the orders' in the 13th century). Greyfriars Priory, for example, is known to have incorporated two libraries and is thought to have been a rare double-cloistered priory. Subsidiary buildings may have included farm or garden buildings, mills or industrial workshops as well as housing for tenants. In addition this area covers a part of the medieval city walls (including standing remains that are designated as scheduled monuments) and has the potential for remains of the boundary ditches of the Saxon and later medieval town. These provide the opportunity for waterlogged remains preserving organic material.</p>	

3. WHY IS IT LOCALLY VALUED? Is the interest of the asset valued locally for any of the following reasons?	Tick / Rank
Association: It connects us to people and events that shaped the identity or character of the area	y
Illustration: It illustrates an aspect of the area's past that makes an important contribution to its identity or character	
Evidence: It is an important resource for understanding and learning about the area's history	y
Aesthetics: It makes an important contribution to the positive look of the area either by design or fortuitously	
Communal: It is important to the identity, cohesion, spiritual life or	y

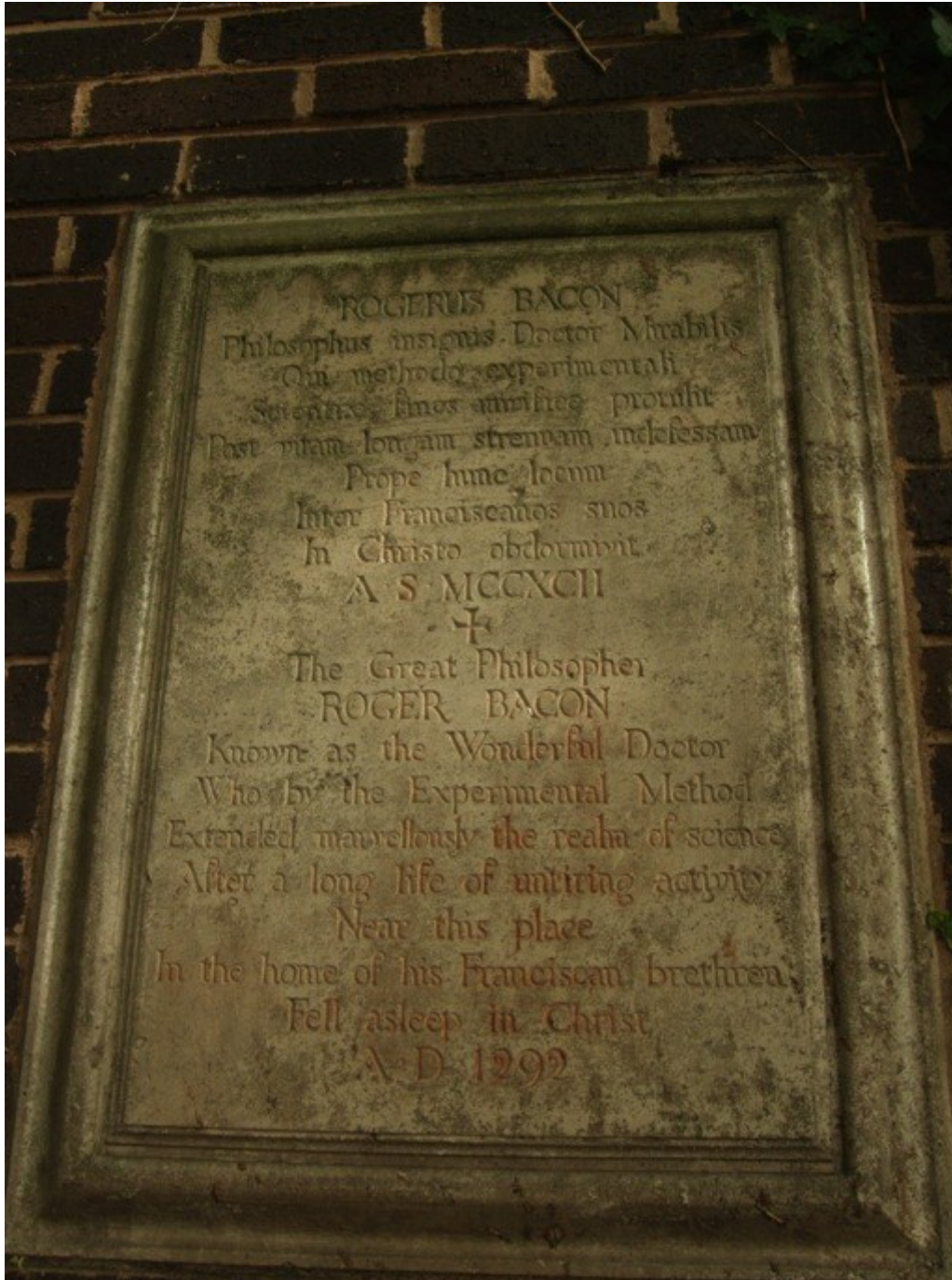
Nominate a Heritage Asset

memory of all or part of the community	
<p>How is the asset locally valued as heritage?</p> <p>Association and Communal value: The establishment of the Greyfriars is of particular importance for its association with the first Franciscan mission to the country and is considered to have national and even international significance for its role as the most important teaching centre ('Studium Generale') of the order in England in the medieval period and as one of their two most important centres in Europe in the 13th century. The associative value of the site includes its associations with some of the most significant scholars and scientists of the Middle Ages, including Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175-1253, first chancellor of the university and the foremost scholar of his time), Roger Bacon (c. 1214-1294), John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347), who helped to make Oxford an international centre of learning. As such, the site, which is marked by a commemorative plaque recording the life of Roger Bacon, is considered to have considerable Communal value for the scholars of the University as the site of one of the founding institutions that secured its prestigious status.</p> <p>Evidence: Surviving archaeological remains of the Priory have the potential to supply information about its historic development, organisation and the daily lives of these famous medieval scholars, which would inform our understanding of the origins of the University and its character from the 13th century until the Dissolution. Remains of the city walls, including evidence of earlier boundaries and ditches provide potential sources of information to learn about the development of the early medieval 'burh' of Oxford. The potential for survival of waterlogged remains raises a high potential for the survival of organic material that provides a wealth of information about the environment and living conditions of the Saxon or medieval town. During the 1970s the finds of remains of medieval alembics (equipment used by alchemists in distilling) at St Ebbe's suggested that remains associated with the scientific researches of the Priors scholars could be uncovered.</p>	

4. WHAT MAKES ITS LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE SPECIAL? Do any of the following features make the heritage significance of the asset stand out above the surrounding environment?	Tick
Age ... Is it particularly old, or of a date that is significant to the local area?	y
Rarity ... Is it unusual in the area or a rare survival of something that was once common?	y
Integrity ... Is it largely complete or in a near to original condition?	y
Group value ... Is it part of a group that have a close historic, aesthetic or communal association?	
Oxford's identity ... Is it important to the identity or character of the city or a particular part of it?	y
Other ... Is there another way you think it has special local value?	
<p>How does this contribute to its value?</p> <p>Age and integrity: The site is very considerable age and having suffered the ravages of the Dissolution and the subsequent development of the area as one of the most populous districts of the city is it surprising that any remains of it are to be found. Nevertheless archaeological investigation has revealed significant elements of the plan of the Priory Church and at least one of its cloisters suggesting there is a high potential for the survival of further remains in the surrounding area, which makes this an are with a high potential integrity. The Priory would be regarded as dating from the earliest years of the University and represents an institution that played a very significant role in its development during the Middle Ages.</p> <p>Rarity and Oxford's identity: The Greyfriars Priory was the most significant teaching</p>	

Nominate a Heritage Asset

centre for the Franciscan Order in Medieval England and ranked only second to the scholar generale in Paris. The evidence of well preserved remains makes it a very site (the Grefriars Priory in Cambridge was completely demolished to building Trinity College in the 1776th century and its site later redeveloped for Sidney Sussex College). The development of the Franciscan Priory in Oxford (with the near contemporary Dominican Priory) propelled Oxford into an international status as a centre of learning in the 13th century, from which the University has grown to this day, making a very significant contribution to the identity of the city.



The Roger Bacon memorial plaque

Nominate a Heritage Asset



Map showing the approximate area of Greyfriars Priory and the Paradise Gardens (formerly the Priory of the Friars of the Sacrament)

West End Study Map

Scale: 1:4,461
 © Crown Copyright and database right 2011.
 Ordnance Survey 100019348.

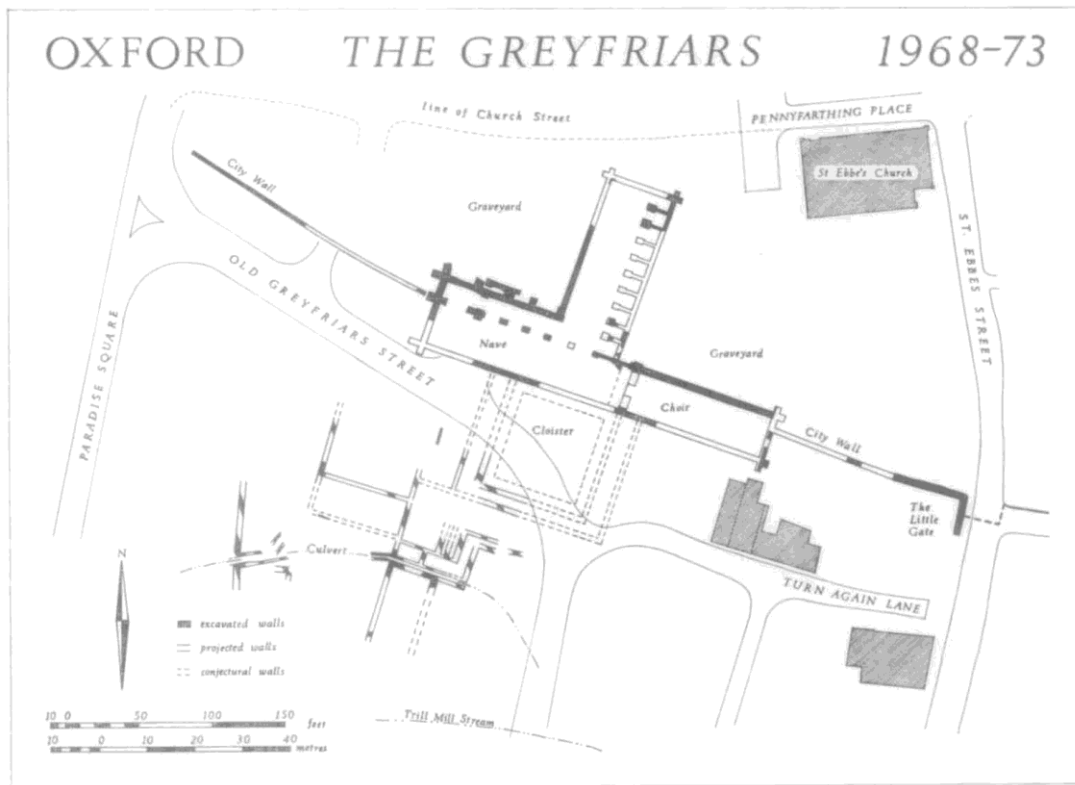


FIG. 2

A plan of the Greyfriars priory church, including the unusual teaching nave based on excavations undertaken in 1968-73 (from Hassal, et. al., 1974, Excavations at oxford 1973-4, Oxoniensia XXXIX)