

Excavations at Oxford 1973-74

SIXTH and FINAL INTERIM REPORT

By T. G. HASSALL with B. G. DURHAM and H. WOODS

FROM 1967 to the spring of 1974 the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee has been responsible for almost continuous excavation.¹ In this Interim Report further excavations on the sites of the Blackfriars and the Greyfriars are described and also the excavation in All Saints Church. The final season of the Churchill Hospital excavations is described elsewhere.² In the immediate future no further large excavations are planned since the City's redevelopment programme is slowing down. It is intended that this report should be the final Interim Report in the present series and it is hoped to begin the full publication of the sites so far excavated.

The start of a phase of publication of Oxford excavations coincides with a far-reaching reorganization of the structure of rescue archaeology in the Oxford area. A new Committee, entitled the Oxfordshire Archaeological Committee, has been established with the encouragement of the Department of the Environment and the Oxfordshire County Council. The Oxfordshire Archaeological Committee has brought together under one umbrella committee all the excavation committees and grant-receiving groups operating in the new County of Oxfordshire. The new Committee has established as its executive arm the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit under the direction of Mr. T. G. Hassall. The Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee will continue in existence as a federated member of the new Committee and Mr. Hassall remains Honorary Director while Mr. B. G. Durham who has been Mr. Hassall's assistant in Oxford has been redesignated Field Officer of the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee. Mr. Durham's title follows the nomenclature of posts within the Unit.

The death of Dr. W. A. Pantin was a very great loss to the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee. Dr. Pantin was President of the Committee and he had been an enthusiastic member since its formation in 1967. Throughout the current series of excavations he had provided invaluable academic advice as well as active moral and financial support. He was a familiar figure on the excavations, particularly of the Friary sites, where his personality endeared him both to the excavators and the contractors working on the sites. Dr. Pantin's death has left a gap which it will be impossible to fill.

Throughout the year a large number of people have been involved with the excavations in Oxford. Mr. C. J. Young, assisted by Mr. P. J. Fasham, directed

¹ For previous accounts of recent excavations in Oxford see the Interim Reports in *Oxoniensia*, xxxiv (1969)-xxxvii (1972).

² See pp. 1-11.

the Churchill Hospital excavations for a final season. Mr. Fasham also supervised the work on the Greyfriars. Mr. Young's report appears elsewhere in this volume. Mr. B. G. Durham was in charge of the work in All Saints, assisted by Mr. H. Woods. Mr. Woods was in charge of the continued excavations on the Blackfriars. Mr. M. Robinson supervised the final work at the Hinxey Hall site in New Inn Court. Miss J. M. Mellor shouldered the responsibility for both the general administration and the finds. Miss P. Horsman continued to help with the finds. Two draughtsmen, Mr. D. Sheard and Miss A. Howard-Drake, worked during the year assisted by Mrs. E. Beard. The figures in this report were prepared by Mrs. Beard and Mrs. S. Lumley-Smith. As in the last few years the actual digging has tended to be carried out by a small number of volunteers recruited from Oxford and elsewhere, and by the Oxford University Archaeological Society. The O.U.A.S. supervised by Mr. G. Lambrick also carried out a small but unproductive trial excavation in the yard of the Old Black Horse, St. Clements. This team project relies on the unstinted support of all these people.

It is also a pleasure to thank all those officers of Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council who have contributed so much time to the Committee's work; Miss C. M. Preston of the Town Clerk's Department who has continued to serve as Assistant Secretary; Mr. W. H. P. Davison the Hon. Treasurer, who has been assisted by Messrs. J. H. Day, E. Boot, D. Tyrell and A. B. Lindsell. The Excavation Committee has also received continued assistance from the City Architect and his staff, particularly Mr. J. H. Ashdown; the City Engineer and members of his Special Projects section and the City Estates Surveyor and especially Mr. Flint of his department. Finally Mr. Richard Foster, the Director of the City and County Museum has continued to offer the museum's constant backing, without which conservation work could not have been carried out.

The Excavation Committee is always grateful to its donors; in addition to the regular subscribers, listed at the end of this report, the Pilgrim Trust, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Academy made generous contributions. The All Saints Church excavation received a special grant from The Society of Antiquaries, and Lincoln College, the owners of the site, also gave generous financial support by reimbursing to the Committee the cost of the removal of spoil from the site. Several local firms also made special contributions including Morrells Brewery, City Motors and Hartford Motors who hired a lorry to the Committee at very preferential rates for the All Saints excavation.

ALL SAINTS CHURCH

A rescue and salvage excavation was carried out within the former Church of All Saints in the High Street, Oxford, from April 1973 to April 1974. The Church is first mentioned in a document in 1122 when it was granted to St. Frideswide's Priory.³ The medieval building survived until its collapse in 1699 when it was replaced by the existing classical church which was built in 1707-8.⁴ The church

³ S. R. Wigram (ed.), *The Cartulary of the Monastery of St. Frideswide at Oxford*, 1, O.H.S., xxvii (1895), 10-11.

⁴ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *City of Oxford* (1939), 125-127.

has now become redundant and it is being converted into a new library for Lincoln College. The plan for the conversion includes an underground reading room below the entire floor area of the present structure. In view of the archaeological potential of the site the Governing Body of the College allowed a controlled excavation of one sixth of the floor of the existing building to the depth of the new basement and deeper in agreed areas. Following the controlled excavation the builder's mechanical excavation was observed.

The Bursar, Mr. Christopher Ball, the architect, Mr. Robert Potter and the Contractors, Benfield and Loxley were extremely helpful at all stages of the work.

Below the present floor level there was 1.5 m. of rubble forming the podium for the existing building. There was a large number of 19th century brick vaults. A hot air central heating system cut through this rubble, which had very largely protected the earlier stratified deposits. These comprised at least four phases of the medieval church which was predated by a further six phases of Saxon domestic occupation.

Apart from unstratified sherds of Roman pottery the first occupation on the site was demonstrated by a very extensive spread of charred grain found on the original ground surface. This grain has been dated by radiocarbon to A.D. 880 ± 80 and A.D. 890 ± 70 . At this time the site may have been a farmyard on which were laid a series of stratified deposits, probably further yard surfaces (PL. III, A). In this 'yard' there developed a fixed property boundary at right angles to the present High Street, which one can assume was already in existence. The property boundary was marked by a row of eight substantial post-holes which were succeeded first by charred wattle structures, and finally by a wattle fence on an almost identical alignment. This fence could be traced most of the way across the controlled excavation and it provided a radiocarbon date of A.D. 970 ± 80 .

To the west of the property boundary there was a massive pit of which probably less than half was within the controlled excavation. Only a small part of the pit could be excavated without creating structural problems for the architects, but that was enough to establish that it had been a cellar, with a row of post-holes set in a slot down the east side, and signs of horizontal wall planks (Phase 3). The cellar had subsequently been used as a conventional cess pit and within its upper backfill there was a fragment of a coin of Edward the Confessor.

The cellar pit was replaced by a very well constructed rectangular stone building, 7 m. \times 6 m., close to the street frontage (Phase 4). Part of the roughly faced north wall (F 19/1) of this building survived because of its later re-use (PL. III, B). The wall rested on a very deep footing of alternate courses of laid and pitched stone (F 72). The depth of the footing may be explained by the fact that it respected the earlier cellar pit whose filling must still have been soft, judging by the dramatic subsidence of later walls and graves. The eastern and western footings were considerably shallower.

For some time during the excavation it was assumed that this building was the embryo church. However the builders' excavation revealed that the west wall of this building had been demolished and partially robbed out for the insertion of the stoke hole and flue of a small furnace. The furnace itself was on the west side of the footing, and the distribution of burning around it suggested that it was enclosed

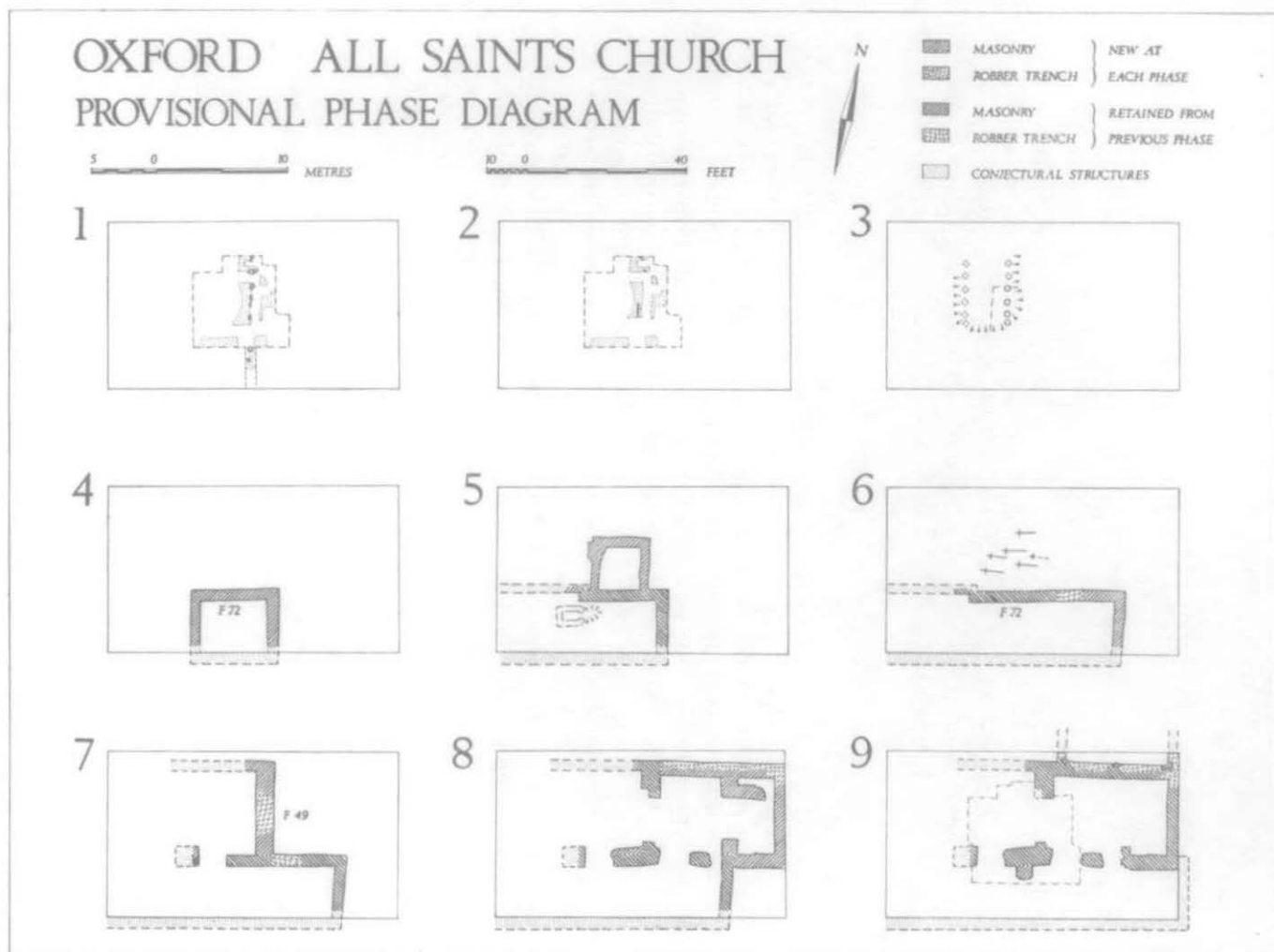


FIG. 1

Oxford, All Saints Church : diagrams of Phases 1 to 9. A distinction is made between new masonry and that retained from the previous phase.

within a westward extension of the stone building. The presence of the furnace seems to imply that the building served a domestic or industrial function. Another smaller stone building was also butt-jointed against the north side of the footing F72 (Phase 5). The north and west walls of this north annex had subsided heavily into the earlier cellar pit and it seems to have been taken down before the area was used as a graveyard for the first church.

The first church appears to have been a conversion and consecration of the domestic stone building described above minus its north annex (Phase 6). Its plan was therefore a simple rectangle; but the chancel was extended to the same width as the nave presumably at an early stage. The graveyard lay to the north and many of the graves subsided into the late Saxon cellar pit.

The Church was then extended by a large north aisle, parallel to the nave (Phase 7). The east wall (F 49) of this aisle cut earlier graves. Part of the footing of F 49 survived where it was butt-jointed onto the footing and wall (F 72 and F 19/1) of the first stone building whose features remained in use as a pier base, but the greater part of this wall survived only as a robber trench (PL. IV, A). The robbing took place when the north aisle was extended eastwards beyond the end of the original chancel. These extensions must have taken place by the middle of the 14th century since by 1349-50 there is the first reference to the 'south aisle'.⁵ This reference implies that the main altar must have been moved to the east end of the north aisle which is later described as the north or College chancel. At the north-east corner of the college chancel the southern side of a two bay crypt was observed. This crypt was presumably beneath St. Anne's Chapel which is first mentioned in 1331.⁶

In its fully developed plan therefore the medieval church had a nave of four or possibly five bays, a chancel with a chapel on its north side with a crypt beneath it, and a south aisle (PL. IV, B). This plan is in general agreement with the contemporary account by Anthony Wood and the building shown on David Loggan's map of 1675.⁷ The excavations have not however given any indication of the nature of the tower or chapels giving off the south aisle. The mortar floor of the building only survived in a few places since it had been riddled by medieval burials. One of these at least was in a stone coffin with a broken lid and other stone slabs with the remains of brass indents were rediscovered in the vestry.

BLACKFRIARS 1974

by H. M. Woods

A rescue excavation was carried out in advance of the building of the Church Army hostel, on the east side of Norfolk Street, and salvage observation and recording were carried out during the extension of the Telephone Exchange and the laying of a new telephone cable in Albert Street South and Speedwell Street. On the Norfolk Street site great assistance was received from the architect of the project Mr. Randall

⁵ W. P. Ellis (ed.), *Liber Albus Civitatis Oxoniensis* (1909), 37.

⁶ H. E. Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, O.H.S., c (1936), 126.

⁷ A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's City of Oxford*, II, O.H.S., xvii (1890), 106-112.

and also from Mr. Jackson of the City Engineer's Department. On the other two sites the contractors, Percy Bilton's Ltd. and Norwest were also very cooperative.

On the Norfolk Street site, two trenches were dug initially. Trench I was intended to locate the western range of the Great Cloister and establish whether the south aisle, sighted in 1969,⁸ was contemporary with the nave. Trench II was intended to establish the nature of the footings west of the church sighted in contractors' pilot trenches in 1973.

Trench I showed that the south aisle wall was keyed onto the wall of the west end of the church, and the middle wall of the cloister range. It also exposed the front wall of the cloister and a small part of the garth.

Trench II showed that the west end of the Church had been extended by one bay, and the trench also exposed a free-standing building partially sealed under Norfolk Street and with eight burials under a pathway impinging on its eastern wall (PL. V, A).

It was then decided to strip the area containing the extension of the church and the northern end of the cloister. A machine was used to remove the build-up sealing the medieval material, and the remainder was dug by hand.

The excavation revealed the back wall of the cloister and demonstrated the relation of the cloister to the extended church. It also exposed a second building standing to the west of the church and a corridor, connecting this building to the back of the cloister and the extended church, which contained eight burials. One of these burials was in a stone coffin, and another contained a pewter chalice and paten.

Pottery found in the soil sealed under the floor of the extended south aisle gave a date of not later than the first quarter of the 14th century for the extension. A complete porringer of the early 14th century found in one of the graves in the corridor to the west gave additional support for this date.

The front wall of the cloister proved to be very shallow and can have supported nothing heavier than a lean-to roof. The undershot cloister alley so typical of Mendicant houses was clearly not used here. The western alley of the cloister contained nine burials, two of which were charcoal burials.

The northern alley contained a tomb built into the wall of the south aisle. Three brass Gothic letters: an E, an I and an S, which would have come from a tomb such as this were found in a robber trench and two post-medieval disturbances.

In Speedwell Street a manhole in the street and a trench along it exposed the middle and back walls of the east range of the Great Cloister, the back wall of the south range and at the bottom of the east range a large footing which is probably part of the reredorter block. In addition a wall was observed returning east from the back wall of the east range. This must form part of a building to the south of the chapter house and it seems probable that the tiled floor recorded by Dr. W. A. Hinnebusch, also formed part of this building.⁹ If so it would have been a large structure and it could be the School—Oxford was a *studium generale* of the Dominican order in addition to being the *studium* of the English province of the order.

⁸ T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1972, Fifth Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxviii (1973), 289.

⁹ W. A. Hinnebusch, 'The Pre-Reformation sites of the Oxford Blackfriars', *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), 78.

The trench down Albert Street South exposed two parallel east-west walls which may form part of the Little (Infirmary) Cloister. At the southern end of this trench, in two manholes in the pavement, in a shaft and in a trial trench in the present County Council Car Park, and in the Telephone Exchange southern extension, a large number of footings was recorded of which it has been possible to recover a plan, and which must represent a complex of buildings on the medieval river-front, facing Ailrich's Ait. On present information it is impossible to interpret these buildings.

THE GREYFRIARS (FIG. 2)

by T. G. HASSALL

From 1968-1970 excavations took place on the site of the Greyfriars Church both before and during construction of Westgate Centre.¹⁰ The excavations uncovered the plan of the Church and showed that it took the form of an inverted letter T. This plan agrees with the description of the church by William Worcestre of 1480.

Work on the domestic buildings was confined to two excavations. In 1969 the area immediately south of the choir was trial trenched in an attempt to locate the eastern range of the cloister. Later disturbances were so concentrated that neither walls nor robber trenches were recognized. A further rapid mechanical trench was dug in 1970 in the north-west corner of the site to be occupied by the St. Ebbes multi-storey car park south of Old Greyfriars Street. In spite of disturbances caused by 19th century cellars the heavily robbed footings of walls were found. These walls were interpreted because of their position as the south-west corner of the main cloister.

In 1973 it was possible to extend the excavations to the multi-storey car park before the start of construction. The extent of the excavated area was limited by the necessity to reinstate the site after excavation, but the corporation undertook to underwrite up to £2,000 worth of reinstatement. Since a complete excavation of the site was not possible it was decided to trench the site at approximately a 45° angle to the presumed building line. By this means it was hoped to find the general position of the domestic buildings south and west of the main cloister. The position of the trenches is not shown on Fig. 2 but they can be inferred from the location of walls which were excavated.

Although many robbed walls were found there remain considerable problems of interpretation, which could not be solved by the unsatisfactory method of excavation. For instance the walls were not all parallel or at right angles with each other, furthermore the distribution of mortar levels which in the previous excavations indicated the presence of an internal floor rather than an external surface does not seem to provide a great deal of clarification. Because of these limitations it is only

¹⁰ For previous accounts of this site see T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1968, First Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxiv (1969), 11; T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969, Second Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 10-15; T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1970, Third Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvi (1971), 6-8.

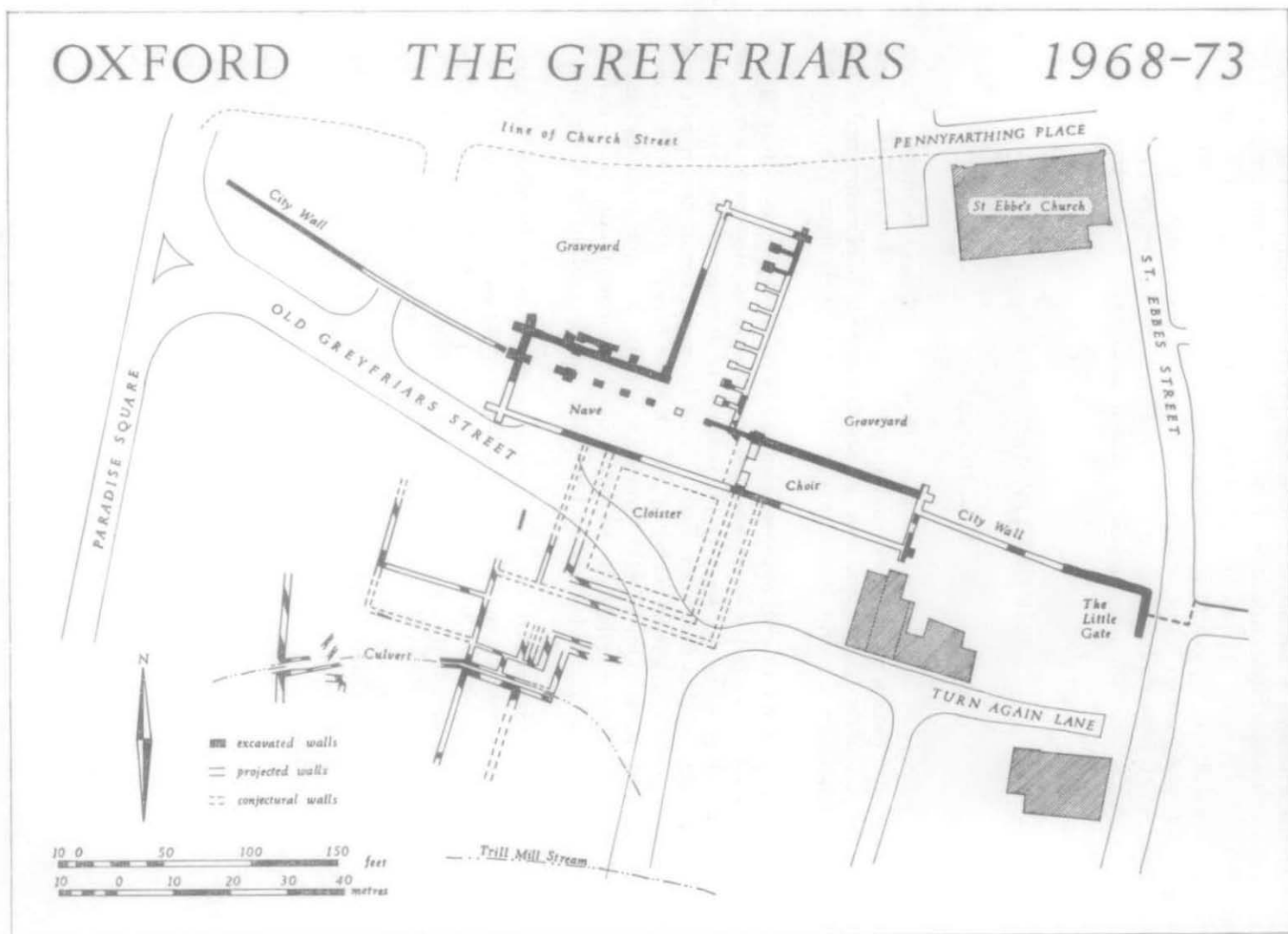


FIG. 2

possible to come to fairly general conclusions as to the real layout and function of the buildings that were uncovered.

Although the details of the buildings are impossible to analyse in detail the general layout seems clear. The latest excavations still support the view that the walls found in 1970 represent the south-west corner of the cloister. If this interpretation is correct then the western range of the cloister extended southwards as far as a culvert (PL. v, B). This culvert took water from the Trill Mill stream and it must have been used as a drain under the building. The southern range originally stopped immediately south of the culvert but it was later extended by a further range which must have reached the northern bank of the Mill Stream itself. This long range of buildings seems to be identical with the range shown by Ralph Agas in his map of Oxford of 1578.

Both east and west of this long south range there were further buildings. To the east there must have been a small building parallel but separated from the south range of the cloister. To the west a series of walls both parallel and at right angles to the extended south range of the cloister indicated another range or series of ranges of buildings apparently grouped around an enclosed courtyard or small cloister. Further south and west there were yet more buildings associated with the culvert, but these buildings were at a slight angle to the main building line.

There are virtually no contemporary references to the domestic buildings or their layout. A. G. Little suggested that the long south range shown on Agas' map which the 1973 excavations seem to have located may have been the refectory in which case the culvert may have been connected with the kitchen.¹¹ Little also suggested that the Library may have been on the west side of the cloisters and that there would also have been extensive accommodation for guests.

The excavations have clearly shown the very great extent of the domestic buildings. The remains will be undisturbed beneath the multi-storey car park which has many piles, but the floor levels do not reach the depth of the surviving footings.

The following contributed to the cost of the excavations in 1973 : The Department of the Environment, Oxford City Council, the Pilgrim Trust, the Gulbenkian Foundation, Oxfordshire County Council, the British Academy, the William Abel Pantin Trust, the Oxford Preservation Trust, the Greening Lamborn Trust, the Society of Antiquaries, Corpus Christi College, All Souls College, Jesus College, Brasenose College, Christ Church, The Queen's College, Merton College, Worcester College, Trinity College, St. John's College, Oriel College, Wadham College, New College, St. Catherine's College, University College, Exeter College, Somerville College, Lady Margaret Hall, St. Peter's College, St. Hugh's College, Keble College, St. Hilda's College, Balliol College, St. Anne's College, Pembroke College.

A grant from the Department of the Environment for the publication of this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

¹¹ A. G. Little, *The Greyfriars in Oxford*, O.H.S., xx (1891), 27.

PLATE III



A. Oxford, All Saints Church. The excavation from the north-west. The original topsoil is visible in four places, pock-marked by late Saxon post-holes and stake-holes. The large cellar pit is unexcavated. The south section (top right) shows late Saxon yard surfaces and a pit, a layer of graves within the medieval church, and the rubble podium of the 18th century church. Scales = 2m.



B. Oxford, All Saints Church. The north face of the pitched stone footing (F78) from the north, with its rough-faced wall on top (F19/1), which had been concealed within the pier base. Scales = 2m.

Phh.: B. G. Durham

PLATE IV



A. Oxford, All Saints Church. View from the north of the east end (F49) of the first north aisle, showing the robber trench cutting graves and unrobbed masonry incorporated into the pier base. Scales = 2m.



B. Oxford, All Saints Church. Vertical view of the controlled excavation with north at the top of the plate. The pier base of the phase 8-9 Chancel arch is at lower centre surrounded by 19th century brick vaults, medieval graves and a medieval stone coffin (bottom right). Scales = 2m.

Phh.: B. G. Durham

PLATE V



A. Oxford, Blackfriars. Trench II, view from the north showing the junction between the extended western bay of the nave and south aisle of the Church (left) and the northern end of the cloister, and also the corridor with burials which separated the church from the free-standing building to its west (right). Scales = 2m.



B. Oxford, Greyfriars. View from the north of the culvert in the claustral area. Scales = 2m.

Phh.: B. G. Durham