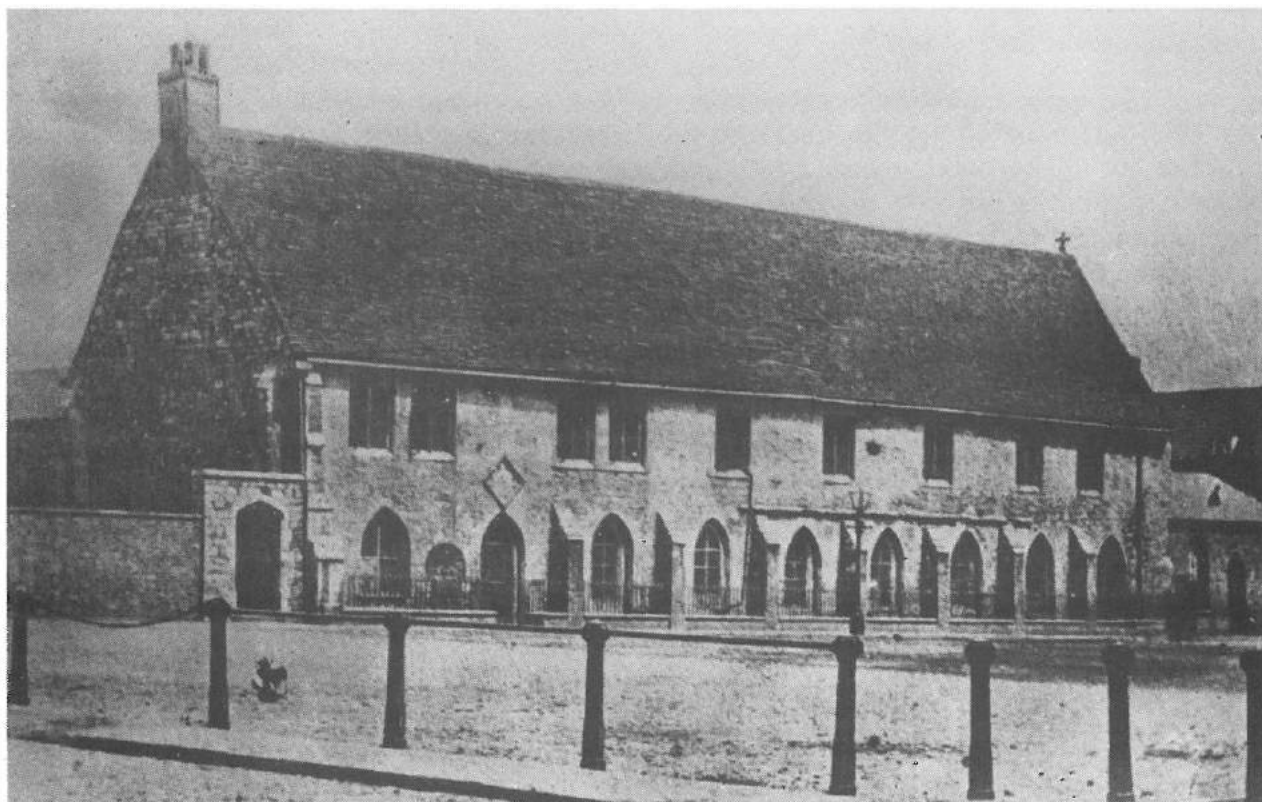


City and County Museum, Lincoln Information Sheet

Archaeology Series No.7

LINCOLN'S MEDIAEVAL FRIARIES

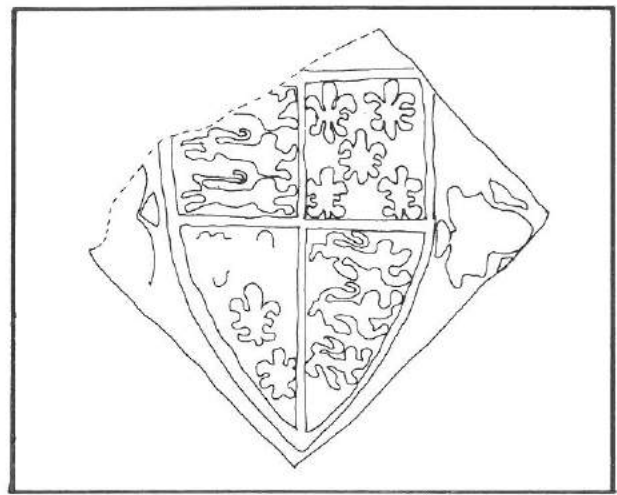
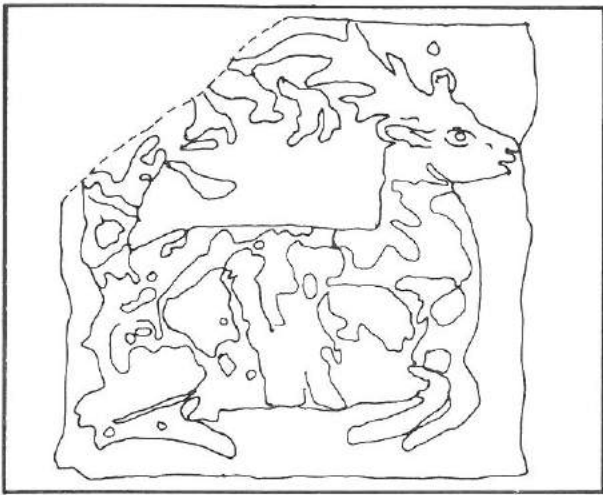


Greyfriars, photographed in 1868 from the Sheep Market, shortly before the building of St. Swithin's Church

The importance and prosperity of a mediaeval town can often be judged by the number of friaries that it supported. Lincoln supported no less than five; the Greyfriars, Blackfriars, Whitefriars, Austin Friars, and the curiously named Friars of the Sack. Taken together the friaries must have added something in the region of 150-200 new faces to the already very large religious establishment of Lincoln in the 13th century. When we consider the number of parish clergy, Cathedral clergy, monks, nuns and lay brethren already in the city we might forgive the mediaeval townsman for believing that every other person was a priest.

The friars represented the latest in a series of movements which brought communal religious life to Britain. Established on the continent by the late 12th century they made a quite deliberate descent on Britain during the early 13th century. The Blackfriars were established in 1221, the Greyfriars three years later, while the lesser orders appeared over the next two decades: their targets were the capital and the two University towns, and from there they swiftly colonized the main Cathedral cities. By about 1270 there were few towns which did not have at least one friary; a large number had in excess of four.

Their evangelistic approach was quite different from that of the majority of the monastic orders. They held no property, save the site of their friary, and were supported entirely by public charity. In other words they begged for their living, though there is no evidence that



Mediaeval inlaid floor-tiles found in 1913 to the north of the surviving building of the Greyfriars

they ever accumulated wealth. In return they preached in their own churches, or in parish churches, or in any public place, heard confessions, and were frequently attached to noble families as confessors and advisers. In the absence of an enthusiastic parish clergy or organized social services they won their greatest support among the poor and neglected. Their activities did not endear them to the clergy as they were often in direct competition for standing among the parish community, and for fees. Compromise was eventually reached, but the vigour and enthusiasm of the friars was always resented, and they were often lampooned as lustful and cunning men who lived by fooling the poor and ignorant.

'There I found friars; all the four orders, who preached to the people for their own profit'
(*Piers Plowman* 1377)

Because of their vows of poverty the friars usually settled in centres of population where they could obtain alms and support. As relative latecomers on the scene they often took over ramshackle buildings that no-one else wanted, or settled in the poorer suburbs outside the walls. In Lincoln only the Greyfriars found a site inside the walls; the other houses stood to the north in Newport, to the south in Wigford and to the east in Butwerk. As time went on more impressive buildings were constructed, and the Blackfriars eventually possessed about ten acres, some of which probably formed gardens.

The friars, as great preachers, usually had a church with a large **nave** for the congregation and a small **choir** for themselves, the two being separated by a **walking space** or passage under the central **tower** which gave access. To the south would lie a small **cloister**, a quadrangle with walks around the four sides, overhung by the first floor rooms. Outside the cloister would be the **kitchen** and other domestic buildings. In certain cases and in Orders which placed emphasis on learning much space would be taken up with the provision of separate **studies** for the friars, whose numbers would in any case militate against a single long **dormitory** as used by the monks.

Since the friars owed allegiance direct to the Pope, when Henry VIII had himself made head of the church in England they found it more difficult to organize resistance to the process of Dissolution. The Dissolution of the Lincoln friaries took place in 1539: the Friars of the Sack had disappeared by 1307 but the other four houses were described as poor, there being 'nothing left but stones and poor glass, but meetly leaded'. Although the friars were poor the sites they occupied represented valuable development area. Most of the buildings were left to ruin or demolished for their stone and a part of the Greyfriars is the sole survivor today.

The Greyfriars, Franciscans, or Friars Minors were the first to arrive in Lincoln. In about 1230 they were given a site near the Guildhall and by 1237 had acquired the Guildhall itself from the Mayor and bailiffs. Building work continued into the 1280s and it was said in 1275 that the friars had blocked a postern gate in the city wall and enclosed a lane some years previously in order to build their church and houses against the wall. In 1321 the Mayor and Bailiffs were obliged to remove some of these obstructions because the walls had been made indefensible. Eventually the friars possessed some four acres bounded on the south and east by the city

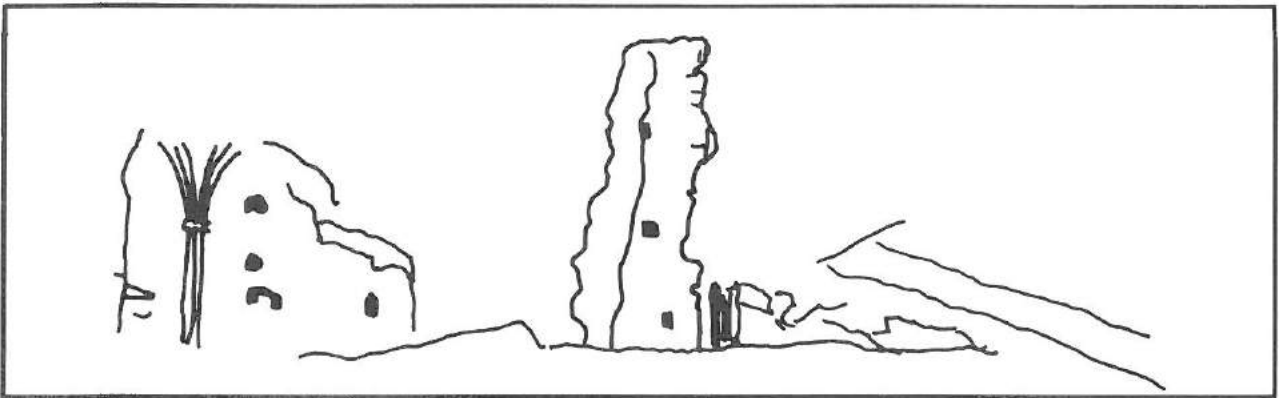
wall (now gone) and on the north and west by the present Silver Street and Freeschool Lane.

In 1534 the friars had permission to take stone from the derelict churches of St. Augustine and Holy Trinity 'at the Greece Foot' and a year later to take the timber roof of 'St. Bathe' church. At the same time they obtained a licence to build a conduit and bring water for it from the spring near Monks' Abbey. The conduit stood at the south-west corner of the present building and was taken over by the city at the Dissolution in 1539, while the building was converted into a private house by William Monson. In 1568 it became a Free Grammar School (under the control of the city from 1574) and survived as such until 1903. Three years after that, following extensive restoration, it became the City and County Museum.

The surviving building 31m (101 feet) long by 6.5m (21 feet) wide probably began as the friar's church, but within a few years a better site to the north was probably obtained and the unfinished church was converted into a two-storey domestic building by inserting a vault and altering the windows. Excavations by the Museum Curator, Mr. A. Smith, in the early part of this century, revealed traces of buildings immediately to the north of the Museum and a number of floor tiles were also found in the same area in 1913. In 1973 excavations by Mr. John Wachter of Leicester University uncovered massive foundations probably belonging to the church on a vacant site just south of Silver Street.

The Blackfriars, Dominicans or Friars Preachers arrived in Lincoln before 1238 and obtained a site 'in Silvergate outside Pottergate', which can be identified as the site now covered by the Sessions House and Technical College in Monk's Road. In 1260 they constructed a conduit which probably took its water from the same spring as that of the Greyfriars. A lane which no doubt formed the northern extension of Friars' Lane was enclosed in 1292.

Timber for building was granted in 1284-90, probably for roofing, and by 1311 the church and churchyard were ready for consecration. The eventual extent of the Blackfriars' land was about 10 acres, far greater than any of the other friaries in Lincoln. At the Dissolution in 1539 this was leased to Thomas Burton, but in 1545 it was sold to John Broxholme and John Bellow, who were acting as agents for smaller buyers.



The remains of the Blackfriars in 1724, after a sketch by Samuel Buck

A few fragments of the Friary survived until at least 1724 when they were sketched by the artist and engraver Samuel Buck, and in 1931 foundations of an apsidal building were discovered during the building of the Technical College. Coffins and skeletons found in 1848 in the 'Beast Square' (now the Sessions House car park) probably represent the graveyard of the lost church of Holy Trinity and not the Friary.

The Whitefriars, Carmelites, or Our Lady Friars, were established by 1269 in the southern suburb of Wigford. Their site, covering some four acres, was destroyed by the building of the St. Mark's Railway Station. The original property was extended by a grant of Edward I in 1280 and the house seems to have been a popular one, with small donations made to it in wills. In about 1490 the friars faced disaster when their church was struck by lightning and the tower, dormitory and a quantity of their books burnt. Nonetheless they still had a valuable library when Leland visited Lincoln some fifty years later.

After the Dissolution the site was eventually sold to John Broxholme, an agent for monastic land, in 1544.

John Leland, writing about 1540, says 'there lay in a chapel at the White Feres a rich Marchant caullid Ranulphus de Kyme whos image was thens taken and set at the south end of the new castelle of the conducte of water in Wikerford'. The conduit still stands next to the church of St. Mary-le-Wigford though Ranulf's monument was removed last century. Fragments of architectural features similar to those forming the conduit were found on the site of the friary in 1832, so the conduit was almost certainly constructed from friary stone: it may even be made from fragments of a chantry chapel to Ranulf de Kyme.

The Austin Friars settled in Newport, the suburb to the north of the city, in about 1269, and the church and precinct were ready for consecration in 1291.

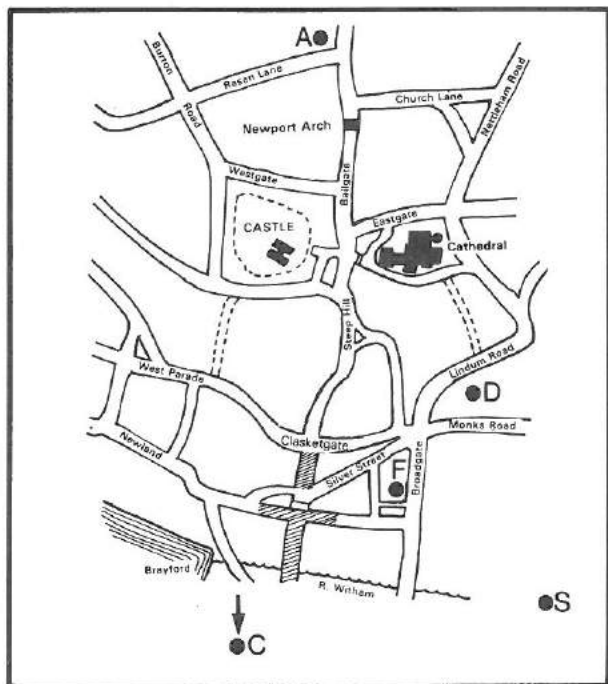
In 1293 land given to them in Grimsby was used for the founding of another Austin Friary there.

Their friary stood on the western side of Newport to the north of the present Rasen Lane, and covered some four acres. John Leland saw the ruins of it when he visited Lincoln in about 1540.

Very little is known about the history of this house. At the Dissolution the site was let to Robert Dighton but in 1545 it was purchased by John Bellow and Edward Bayliss, probably acting as agents for others.

The Friars of the Sack, or Friars of the Penance of Jesus Christ, were one of the lesser orders of Friars and survived in Lincoln for less than half a century. Established before 1266 on the north bank of the River Witham at Stamp End about a quarter of a mile outside the city walls, they were the poorest of the Orders in Lincoln, with less than half an acre of land. In 1268 they were still involved in building, but in 1274 along with the other lesser orders of friars they were forbidden to recruit new members. In 1300, however, four friars still remained but all had gone by 1307.

An attempt by the canons of Barlings Abbey to obtain the site for warehouses in which to store hides, wool, and corn, was defeated by the citizens. The friars' church survived and in 1327 two chaplains were celebrating masses there. In 1359 Joan, the daughter-in-law of Philip de Kyme who had earlier been granted the site, established a chantry chapel with five priests to pray for the soul of her second husband, Nicholas de Cantilupe.



Plan of Lincoln showing position of friaries

*A = Austin Friars C = Carmelites
D = Dominicans F = Franciscans
S = Friars of the Sack*

SOURCES

- J.W.F. Hill *Mediaeval Lincoln* (1948)
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- W. Page *Victoria County History: Lincolnshire vol. II* (1906)
- City and County Museum records
- Lincolnshire Archives Office

Andrew White January 1979
City and County Museum,
Lincoln.