

# EXCAVATIONS AT IPSWICH BLACKFRIARS IN 1898 AND 1976

by DR JOHN BLATCHLY, F.S.A. AND KEITH WADE, B.A.

IF THE CLAUSTRAL buildings of Ipswich Blackfriars which Kirby illustrated in 1748 (Pl. II) were standing today, they would, taken together with the Blackfriars church at Norwich which is complete but for its central octagon adornment, give a tolerably complete view of the fabric of a Dominican friary. Kirby was just in time, for the building which Mr Gilyard-Beer, in the preceding paper, names the frater was taken down in 1763, the Grammar School moving out of it to the first floor dormitory in the north-east range. Here it remained until 1842, the year in which sweeping demolition began in the southern cloister with Christ's Hospital. The last building to come down, in 1849, was the north-east range itself but some arches in a wall survived, as John Wodderspoon (1850, 307) wrote: '... the lower portion of the building discloses several early English arches where the back [the east side] abuts on the houses forming the street called the Lower Wash'. John Glyde, writing in 1884, repeats that 'several . . . arches were found when the building was pulled down' (Glyde, 1884, 61).

The 1:500 Ordnance Survey map of 1884 shows a substantial wall forming the eastern boundary wall of the playground of the day school Christ's Hospital which was built and opened between 1861 and 1864 and gave School Street its name. This wall with seven arched openings, all alcoves facing west, survives today and is the Standing Wall referred to throughout this article (Pl. III). Near it in 1898 (the school had become the Girls' Endowed School) Miss N. F. Layard opened eight trenches in a single day, but left no record of her discoveries beyond a long article in a local newspaper.

In March 1976 Mr Gilyard-Beer visited Ipswich to examine the Standing Wall. He found it puzzling, as several of the arches gave the appearance of being built of re-used stonework. He outlined to us ideas about the arrangement of the friary which he would put forward in his paper, and we commenced a series of small excavations to test his theories. In the course of opening five trenches between March and September 1976 we located the corners of three important areas, the sacristy, chapter house and Friars' choir. We were then able to lay Kirby's plan, to scale, on the 1884 map (Fig. 8), and so interpret Miss Layard's observations in the light of our own.

## THE 1898 EXCAVATIONS

In the following extracts from Miss N. F. Layard's article 'Underground Ipswich' in the *East Anglian Daily Times* for 28 September 1898, her references to the refectory and church should be read as referring to the north-east range and frater respectively. For convenience her trenches have been given Roman numerals (Fig. 8).

On the 27 August last, being anxious to verify the report that walled-up skeletons had been found only five years ago in a subterranean wall in School Street, I commenced digging against the broken end of the old refectory wall [the Standing Wall] of the Blackfriars which now bounds the playground of the Girls' Endowed School [I]. Removing the pavement from the path, we soon came upon a brick wall, running obliquely across the road. This wall was 14ins in thickness thinly plastered on the west side, and ran to a depth of 4ft 4ins below the surface. Against it, and running parallel to it, was the foundation of that part of the refectory wall, which, till within a few years, I am told, crossed School Street at this point. Noticing that the wall of the house opposite (No. 9 School Street) ran at the same angle, I asked permission to go

into the little yard belonging to it, and there at once found the old rubble wall continued, as far as the yard extended [Ia].

We had not dug down more than 4ft 5ins against the refectory wall when the workmen came upon a paved floor of square, pinkish-red tiles, some of them showing signs of having been enamelled, and apparently arranged in a pattern. We only, however, opened sufficient ground to see that next to one large tile, four smaller ones were placed, and so on, alternately, and these were thickly cemented on the underside. This I take to be the original floor of the refectory.

A second hole [II] made in a line with the first but nearer to the centre of the road, again exposed the wall running across the street. Here, at a depth of 5ft, we constantly turned up the smaller red tiles, some of them retaining the green glaze, but no large tiles were found in this part. These had all been disturbed in the laying down of the drain pipe which we came upon several feet further down. A small piece of grey Roman pottery, about 4ft below the surface, and a verdigrised brass harness-ring found at a depth of 6ft, in apparently undisturbed soil, gave rise to considerable speculation.

As my primary object was to find the wall, of which I had been told, running up School Street, we now opened the ground a little to the left of the first buttress, on the left side of the centre door of the Girls' Endowed School [III]. About 72ins from the path we soon came upon the side of a massive wall, which ran in a somewhat slanting direction up the street. The wall was 3ft 5ins thick, composed of masses of mortar and undressed flints. At a depth of 4ft we arrived at the cement foundation. With a view to discovering how far this wall extended up the street, we opened up a trench [IV] almost across the road, opposite to No. 6 School Street and worked to a depth of 5ft 6ins, but, finding nothing beyond a great deal of broken material, evidently the debris of a former rubble wall, the hole was filled up. Following the direction of the wall already found, we then made an opening [V] about 12ft back from Foundation Street, and 2ft to the right of a grating near to the end of School Street. At a depth of 1ft 4ins a wall, similar to the other in thickness and construction, came to light. This met, and cut, another wall, running obliquely across the road, and as the direction taken by this latter exactly corresponded to the lie of the refectory wall at the other end of the road, it seemed to make it at once as belonging to the monastic buildings. Indeed, from measurements taken beforehand, I imagined that we were now on the site of the old Blackfriars church, which stood in front of the refectory, but at some distance from it, and a piece of lead-light and a green, glazed tile, which we presently disinterred, seem to confirm the conclusion. The wall itself was sufficiently puzzling, for, although to a depth of three or four feet, it was of great thickness and unmistakeable antiquity, it was continued downward to a depth of 7ft 7ins, the lower part being not more than a foot and a half thick and composed of comparatively modern red bricks. Here we reached a red brick floor, in perfect order, but loosely laid, with no cement to keep the bricks in place. The bricks slanted from the wall, giving the impression that it had been built over the floor. Evidently more recent work had been added to the old structure and a passage or chamber opened below the foundations of the old wall. A few odds and ends, turned out in the course of excavating, helped to people the past again, and to give just the living touch that was wanting. We broke into the wall about 2ft from the base of it, to look for human relics, and only then found that the lower portion was far too slight to contain anything of the kind: but it was too late in the day to attack the immensely strong masonry higher up. Among the debris, however, of the broken wall, which we found surrounding the drain-pipe, which



FIG. 8—Evidence for the Blackfriars plan overlaid on Ordnance Survey 1:500 map, 1884. Arabic numerals indicate the 1976 discoveries, Roman numerals those of Miss Layard in 1898.

lay on the right, the following bones were picked up: a right human heel-bone, the lower portion of a human right radius (probably that of a female), with small portions of a human skull.

We now turned our attention to the playground of the Girls' Endowed School, as I was anxious to find the west wall of the refectory, and so to confirm the belief that the arched wall now standing was indeed the east wall. We made in all three excavations in the playground—one against the yard gate [VI], where at a depth of 2ft 8ins we came to a very rough floor of stones and brick. Pieces of very rough Roman pottery and a Roman pin were found here. Working against the arched recesses of the old wall [VII], we found that they continued to a depth of 15ins below the present surface. This gave a better contour to the arches. A piece of iridescent bull's-eye glass and a fragment of rough Roman pottery here came to light. From between two of the arches a rough rubble wall started and appeared to cross the playground, but we did not follow it up.

Perhaps we felt our exertions most rewarded when Hole 8 [VIII] was at last opened against the corner of Messrs. Catchpole's Brewery, which is one of the boundaries of the playground. Knowing that the width of the refectory was 24ft I measured this also, and we had hardly dug down more than a foot on this spot, when the pick struck the wall we were seeking. Having satisfied ourselves as to its width and construction, which seemed to correspond to that of the east wall, we were obliged reluctantly to fill up the hole, and to leave both playground and road as neat and trim as we found them.

#### THE 1976 EXCAVATIONS

Figs. 9 and 10 show the positions and details of the trenches.

##### *Trench 1* (Ipswich Archaeological Survey 4703 0001)

No structural remains were revealed and the trench was abandoned at approximately 90cm from the present ground surface.

##### *Trench 2* (IAS 4703 0002)

At a depth of 36cm an east-west flint and mortar wall (90cm wide) was revealed and at 78cm depth the flint and mortar foundation projected a further 33cm to the south. The construction was flint rubble and mortar faced with knapped flint.

##### *Trench 3* (IAS 4704 0001)

This trench had no distinguishable layers and was still producing 17th–19th-century pottery and building rubble at 1.6m below present ground surface, at which depth it was abandoned.

##### *Trench 4* (IAS 4704 0002)

The corner of a medieval building, on which was built the curved and sloping wall of a Victorian soakaway, was revealed in the south-west corner of the trench, at a depth of 1.1m from the present ground surface. The wall was flint rubble and mortar, faced with knapped flint and septaria blocks with vertically-tooled limestone quoins. Above this lay the foundations of a single-thickness Victorian brick wall (the south-west corner of a building shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map) and a sewer pipe running to the soakaway.

##### *Trench 5* (IAS 4704 0007)

A substantial medieval wall, running north-south, was soon revealed just a few centimetres below the present ground surface. It appeared to terminate in a jagged end just south

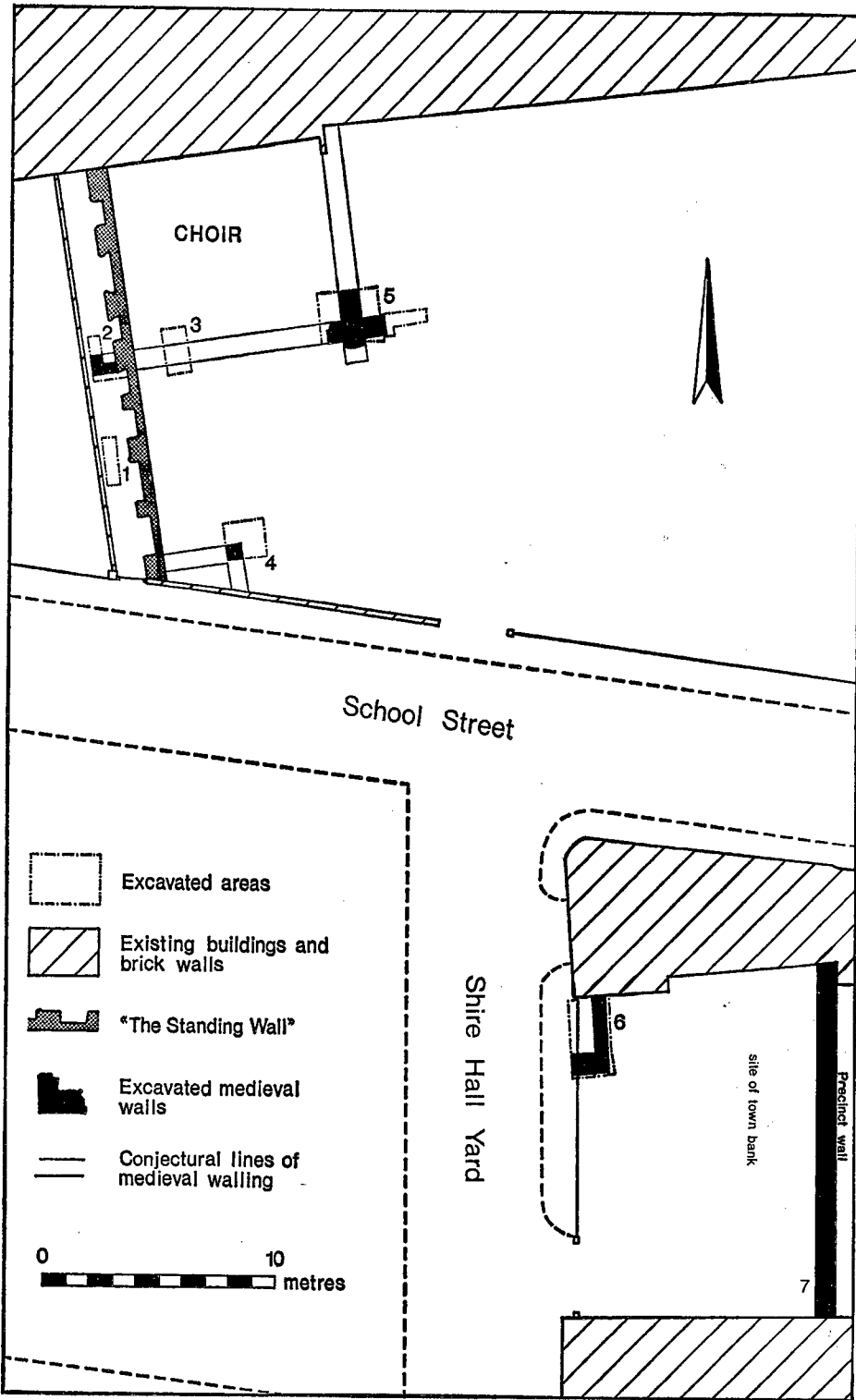


FIG. 9—1976 trenches showing the relationship of exposed medieval walls to each other and to the present topography.

of the southern trench edge and a trial hole against this showed it to be the case for 30–40cm below the surface. Further excavation uncovered a buttress, running east and at right angles to the wall. From its position it seemed clear that the jagged southern end of the north-south wall was the stump of a corresponding buttress at right angles to a wall running due west. This was confirmed, on the west side of the north-south wall, when, at a depth of 1.14m the stub of such a wall, formerly running westward, was discovered. The robbing of this east-west wall had stopped at its abutment onto the north-south wall and the resultant scar on the western side of the latter had been faced with several courses of red bricks ( $9\text{ins} \times 2\frac{1}{4}\text{ins} \times 4\frac{1}{2}\text{ins}$ ).

The survival of the north-south wall to such a height undoubtedly resulted from its use as a property boundary (on Ogilby's map of Ipswich, 1674, and on all later maps until 1813) and the fact that it marks part of the southern boundary of the parish of St Margaret's. The construction of the remaining wall and buttress was of septaria blocks and flints, faced on the edges, resting on a flint and mortar foundation. The outside of the wall and buttress displays a plain-chamfered plinth executed in limestone blocks all of which have fine, vertical tooling.

#### *Trench 6 (IAS 6902 0011) and Wall 7 (IAS 6902 0009)*

These walls were revealed by contractors levelling the site in 1976. Wall 7 was planned and found to be a continuation of the Friars' precinct wall discovered to the south in 1959 (West, 1963, 292).

In Trench 6 there was found a north-south wall with a second wall running west from its south end and abutting onto it with a straight joint. Both walls were flint and septaria rubble with knapped facing stones and plastered on the inside (the west- and north-facing sides). The south wall had a garderobe built into its thickness, contemporary with floor 2 (Fig. 10), and lined with bricks, chamfered on the recess jambs. The fill of the building was building rubble right down to floor 2. Below this floor, another, presumably the original, was found, along with a projecting septaria foundation for the wall. The axis of the building remains uncertain but it is likely to have been east-west and could have joined the south end of the north-east range.

#### *Wall 8*

The foundations of a substantial medieval wall, underpinned with later brick, survives as the north wall of the basement under No. 3 Foundation Street. Although now painted it appears to be of similar construction to the other medieval walls excavated in 1976. In 1974, during alterations to the basement, human skeletal remains were found in a contractor's hole (IAS 4702). It would seem unlikely that these had moved far from their original resting place, and are most likely burials associated with the Blackfriars' church.

### FINDS

#### *Medieval floor tiles*

An assortment of floor tile fragments was virtually the only medieval find. The tiles were all from the lower levels of Trench 2, adjacent to the wall foundation, but not *in situ*. Square tiles were present in six sizes (thickness in brackets):  $4\text{ins}$  ( $\frac{3}{8}\text{ins}$ );  $4\frac{1}{4}\text{ins}$  ( $\frac{7}{8}\text{ins}$ );  $4\frac{1}{2}\text{ins}$  (1in);  $6\frac{1}{2}\text{ins}$  ( $1\frac{1}{8}\text{ins}$ );  $7\frac{1}{4}\text{ins}$  (1in);  $9\frac{1}{8}\text{ins}$  ( $1\frac{1}{4}\text{ins}$ ). Only two had traces of dark green glaze remaining; they were all in a red fabric.

#### *Miscellaneous finds*

Apart from floor tiles there were some window-glass fragments, possibly medieval, amidst the demolition rubble of the friary, and a great deal of 19th-century rubbish in the upper layers of each trench.

## COMMENTARY ON THE 1976 EXCAVATIONS.

Trenches 1 and 2 were opened to locate the cross wall found by Miss Layard in her Trench VII. Without further evidence to go on it could be supposed that the wall found in Trench 2 joining the Standing Wall 25ft (7.6m) from its northern end, was either the north or south wall of the end room of the range (the sacristy). If it were the north wall, it would also form the south wall of the Friars' choir and should be found continued to the east of the Standing Wall to give the choir a reasonable length, say, 50ft (15m). Trench 3 was dug (as it was thought) to settle the point, and as no continuation eastward was found it had to be concluded that either the choir did not project east of the Standing Wall or that at this point the south choir wall was totally robbed.

Trench 4, in which the chapter house north-east corner was found, settled two points. First, that the distance the chapter house projected eastward was 11ft 6ins (3.5m); second, that the cross wall found in Trench 2 was the north wall of the sacristy. There were now sufficient fixed points to overlay Kirby's plan (at the right scale) over the 1884 and modern maps.

Following suggestions made in Mr Gilyard-Beer's paper concerning the relationship between the boundary of St Mary at Quay parish and the north wall of the Friars' church, Trench 5 was marked out to cross the parish boundary (marked by dots on the 1884 map, see Fig. 10). Here, sure enough, the buttressed east wall of the choir of the Friars' church was found standing almost to the level of the present yard surface. This trench, too, clarified several points and posed one difficulty. The fact that the south choir wall was robbed almost to its east end explained why nothing was found in Trench 3. Whereas the east wall of the church was for a long time a property boundary, the south wall was not, and its removal is likely to have occurred over 300 years ago. The length of the Friars' choir east of the walking place was 58ft (17.7m), but as the northern 25ft of the Standing Wall lies across the whole width of the choir it must be of post-Dissolution build. Indeed, it may be even later than the demolition of the north-east range in 1849, built to complete the enclosure of a playground for the Christ's Hospital School of the 1860s. In this connection it is perhaps significant that photographs taken *c.* 1890 show a bench seat under each arch; a purpose-built northern end of the Standing Wall might have had arches incorporated to accommodate more seats.

A drawing by Henry Davy of the sacristy interior, dated December 1850, has been found since our excavations were completed. It shows that the north and south walls of the room, unpierced, met the Standing Wall where we have drawn them in Fig. 8, so that the four southernmost arches of the Wall formed the east wall of the sacristy. All four were blocked then as now and the rafters of the dormitory floor above lay level with the top of the Wall as it stands today. Of the four arches the two to the south were alcoves with stone sills 75cm below present ground level, and the floor of the room was a further 75cm down, 1.5m underground today. It is now clear that in our Trenches 1 and 2 we had not reached the medieval floor level; in such a narrow passage it would be unsafe to excavate further. The two narrower arches to the north were tall doorways, both at present about half buried.

That the southern half of the Standing Wall (Pl. III) is genuine is no longer in doubt, but the northern part must be a rebuild; if a recent one, say *c.* 1860, its archways could well come from the west wall of the same range.

## COMMENTARY ON MISS LAYARD'S ACCOUNT

Fig. 8 shows approximately the location of the trenches.

*Trench 1*

The Ordnance Survey map of 1884 shows that at that time School Street was a cul-de-sac closed by a wall narrower than the Standing Wall but continuing on the same line southward

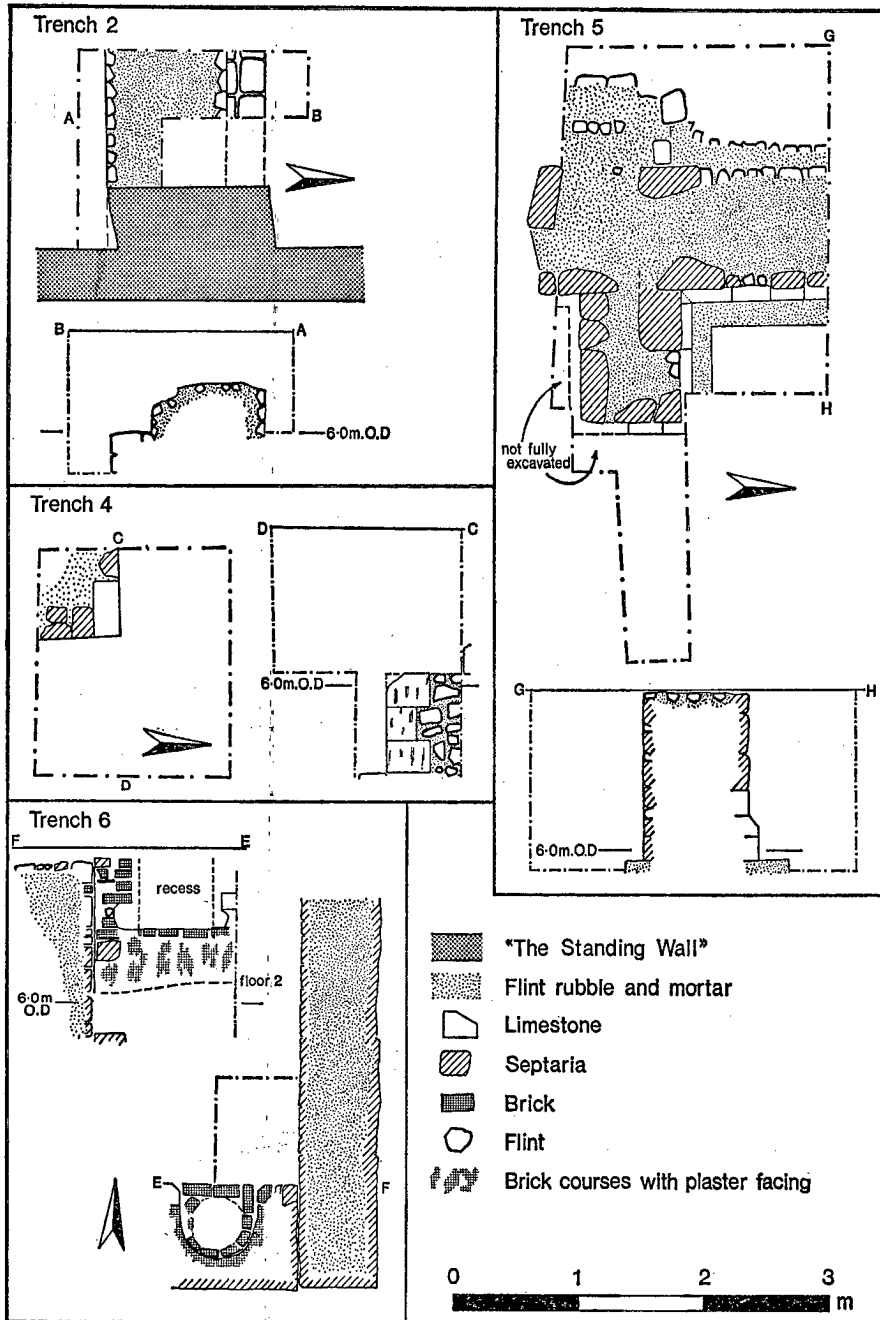


FIG. 10—Plans and sections of medieval walls exposed in Trenches 2, 4, 5 and 6 (1976).



and forming the east boundary wall of the garden of No. 9 School Street. No doubt it was built on the older wall as foundation. What is surprising, since this trench was over the tiled floor of the chapter house ('Chapel for the Foundation' on Kirby's plan), is that the rubble wall ran parallel to it through this room. It must be that at some earlier or later time the chapter house did not project to the east and that Miss Layard found the lower courses of the wall which made the east wall of the range continuous. The projection in question appears on maps and plans from 1674 to 1813, its extent determined by our Trench 4 (see above). The distance from the north end of the Standing Wall to the south end of the yard of No. 9 School Street was 125ft (38m). Kirby and Davy give 100ft (30.5m) for the length of the four-room north-east range; we have shown that it lay on the southernmost 100ft.

#### *Trench II*

Was it merely the brick wall found here, or did the rubble wall still run parallel? This trench was also over the chapter house.

#### *Trench III*

This wall 41ins (104cm) thick was the south nave wall of the Friars' church—the northern boundary wall of the whole site on Kirby's engraving. Compare the thickness of the east and south walls of the chancel: 35½ins (90cm) and 34½ins (88cm) respectively.

#### *Trench IV*

Here Miss Layard was digging over the cloister area.

#### *Trench V*

This trench was at the south-west corner of the nave, but when Miss Layard suggests that she had found the church (which she had) she meant the frater, the north wall of which lay under the frontage of No. 1 School Street and the yard to the west. If we take literally the observation that the wall running north and south was exactly parallel to the Standing Wall, then the west wall of the Friars' nave has to be drawn in at a slight angle to the present direction of Foundation Street. To keep the street a reasonable width, the west nave wall must be drawn about 18ft (5.5m) east of the 24ft 6ins (7.5m) wall shown by Kirby at the north-west corner of his plan. There is nothing to indicate that this wall was part of the church. It could well be that the main entrance to the friary faced north up the street (then St Edmund Pountney Lane); the way in shown on the 1748 plan could have survived from a time when a gatehouse stood to its north and to the west of the church. Richard Felaw in his will made in 1483 left to the school his house (marked on Fig. 8), it 'beyng ageyn the gate of the freyers prechers in Yippiswich'.

It is not possible to comment on the nature and purpose of the underground brick-lined chamber found in this trench.

#### *Trench VI*

This trench was over the sacristy floor which was either not tiled as the chapter house was or had been robbed of its tiles.

#### *Trench VII*

It seems reasonable to assume that Miss Layard was digging at the same point as our Trench 2. Had she stated between which pair of arches she had found the cross wall we would have been saved the trouble of digging Trench 1, if not Trench 2 also.

*Trench VIII*

Miss Layard had correctly aligned the Wall with the east side of the range, but at this point she was so far beyond its northern end that the wall found must have been the northern half of the east wall of the walking place, which was also the choir screen. Admittedly the wall found was on the same line as the range's west wall which she had been seeking.

CONCLUSIONS

Our trial excavations have verified those of Mr Gilyard-Beer's suggestions which relate to the siting of the Friars' church and the arrangement of the buildings in the north-eastern part of the site. They have also enabled us to overlay Kirby's plan on modern maps, demonstrating the accuracy of his survey over the same corner at least. The overall dimensions of the church are established; it was certainly longer (178ft, 54m) than St Mary-le-Tower or St Margaret's (both 127ft, 38m). Almost all Miss Layard's observations have been found to be entirely consistent with the picture given of buried foundations by the overlay of Kirby (in red) on Fig. 8. It is only questionable whether to the west, and of course to the south in the later medieval ranges, Kirby becomes inaccurate in scale and orientation. The existence of one building between those known to Kirby and the eastern precinct wall has been established.

Of the five former religious houses of Ipswich, three are irretrievably lost to archaeologists. We have shown that at the Blackfriars remains worthy of preservation lie very near the present ground surface, and it is reasonable to suppose that substantial walls and other interesting features could be unearthed should larger scale excavation become possible. In the meantime we must look to the documentary research workers for the next additions to our knowledge of this important foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors and the Suffolk Archaeological Unit would like to thank Ipswich Borough Council, Col. H. A. Warner and Mr M. H. Warner for their co-operation and for permission to open the first five trenches. For leave to excavate Trench 6 we are indebted to Mr L. S. Osborne and Orwell Marine Services. The extent to which we have been helped by Mr R. Gilyard-Beer is apparent from this article. To him our grateful thanks, and to Mavis Baker, Jonathan Drake, Stephen Dunmore, Stephen Waters and Tom Loader for assistance with the digs. Mr Loader also drew the figures.

REFERENCES

- Davy, H., 1850. Drawing in D. E. Davy's Suffolk Collections, B.L. Add. MS 19179, f. 126.  
Glyde, J., 1884. *Illustrations of Old Ipswich*. Ipswich.  
Kirby, J. J., 1748. *An Historical Account . . . of the Twelve Prints . . . and copper engraving: The West View of Christ's Hospital in Ipswich*. Ipswich.  
West, S. E., 1963. 'Excavations at Cox Lane (1958) and at the Town Defences, Shire Hall Yard, Ipswich (1959)', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, XXIX, 233-303.  
Wodderspoon, J. W. 1850. *Memorials of the Ancient Town of Ipswich*. Ipswich and London.

*This paper has been published with the aid of a generous grant  
from the Governing Body of Ipswich School.*