

IPSWICH BLACKFRIARS

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APART FROM A rather enigmatic wall that survives on the site, our knowledge of the buildings of Ipswich Blackfriars has in the past depended largely on views and plans made from two to three centuries after the friary had been dissolved, and notably on the western prospect and plan published by John Joshua Kirby in 1748 (Pl. II, Fig. 5) showing the buildings as they appeared after their conversion into the Grammar School, Christ's Hospital and the Bridewell.

Until there are opportunities for large-scale excavation, knowledge is likely to continue to depend on this type of evidence. Meanwhile, mistaken interpretations of two elements in Kirby's plan have tended to confuse the issue by placing the church and the refectory of the friary in demonstrably wrong positions. These mistakes were readily excusable when they were first made over a century ago, for monastic plans were then imperfectly understood and the plans of friars' houses were hardly understood at all, but since that time much work has been done on the architecture of the mendicant Orders¹ and there is now less excuse for hindering a better understanding of the site by repeating these same mistakes into our own days.²

So there may be some profit in looking at Kirby's plan with a fresh eye to see whether there are not features in it that assume a new significance in the light of what is now known of the building practice of the mendicant Orders in general. If this is done it can be seen at once that Kirby's work presents several points of interest, and that one can move back gradually from the confident interpretation of a few easily recognisable features, through reasonable hypotheses, down to the uncertainties of pure speculation (Fig. 6).

The most useful feature of Kirby's plan and prospect is that both enable the room he marks as the 'chapel' to be identified with confidence as the chapter house. It occupies the position on the ground floor of the east range of buildings that is normal in virtually all religious houses. Rectangular in plan and projecting eastwards beyond the range it has the shape and proportions of most chapter houses of the English friars, and it has the tripartite western elevation with a doorway set between two windows that characterises practically all chapter houses.

The position of the chapter house fixes the position of the east range of the claustral buildings of the friary and shows that the garden to the west was the cloister garth, and there is further confirmation of this in Kirby's prospect which shows a horizontal string-course on the east range, broken through in places by the post-Dissolution first-floor windows and representing the creasing for the pent-roof of the east alley of the cloister.

The cloister is closed on the west by the building marked on Kirby's plan as the Grammar School. This grand, single-storeyed hall with its fine traceried windows suggesting a late 13th- or early 14th-century date, and its shallow gabled projection to the west, has traditionally become known as the friars' church despite its north-south alignment. It is not so much the unlikely appearance and the unnecessarily perverse orientation of this building that militate against its being a church; it is rather its relationship to the rest of the claustral buildings. Although a few monastic churches on a north-south alignment exist,³ the position of the high altar in them is always taken as a ritual 'east', and the whole of the claustral layout is planned to conform to this ritual orientation. In other words, had the church at

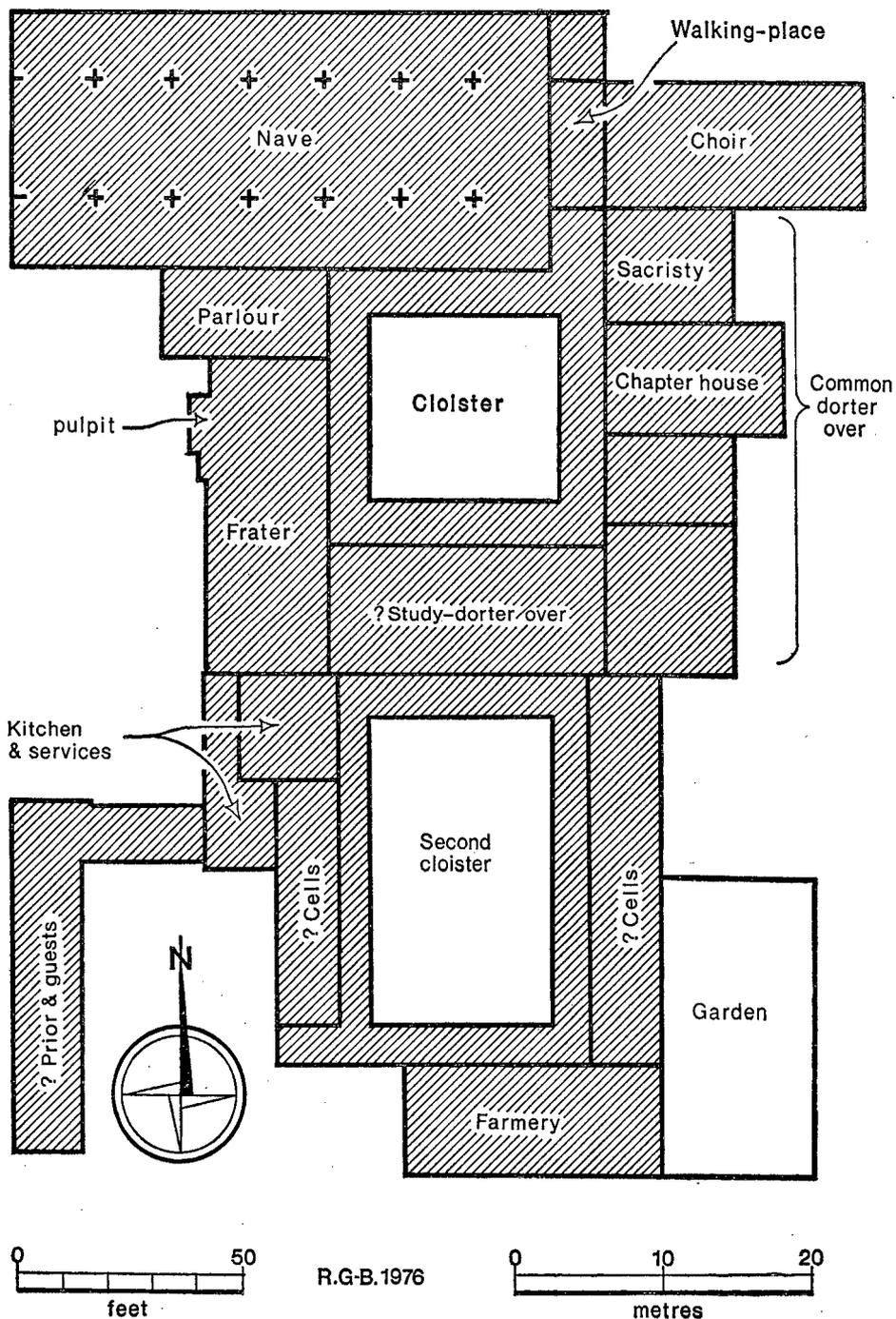


FIG. 6—Outline reconstruction of Ipswich Blackfriars.

Ipswich been on the west side of the cloister with its altar to the north, the chapter house would have been on the north side of the cloister because that represented the ritual 'east'.

Moreover, if one examines the plan and prospect closely, there can be little doubt that this western claustral range at Ipswich was the refectory or frater. It has often been said that the mendicant Orders followed the main lines of the *schema* or disposition of buildings used by the older monastic Orders but allowed themselves to interpret it more loosely. This gives an impression that they were somewhat haphazard in their arrangements and tends to disguise the fact that their form of religious life was radically different from that of the older Orders and that this difference suggested, even when it did not demand, a different arrangement for their buildings.

The refectories of the friaries illustrate this. In monasteries of the older Orders, mostly dependent on endowments of agricultural land, the west range was usually devoted in part to the storage of provisions in bulk, for it was the building in closest contact with the outer world. The mendicant Orders, whose very name reflected their intention to subsist on charity, and who rarely possessed large agricultural estates, had little need of the range for this purpose. On the other hand, they were prepared to countenance and even to encourage a greater degree of access by layfolk to their houses. One expression of this was their readiness to admit layfolk to their refectories (Braunfels, 1972, 138), and by placing the refectory in the west range it became more easily accessible from the outer world. From the little that is known of Dominican refectories in England it seems that this position was adopted more often than not, as at London, Gloucester, Canterbury and probably Bristol.

The details of the building at Ipswich confirm this. It is a large hall of seven bays with windows set relatively high to clear the benches on which the occupants sat at table with their backs to the walls. The gabled projection towards the north end of the west wall is not an atrophied transept (Hinnebusch, 1951, 140) but an elevated refectory pulpit and indeed the stairs leading to it from the south can be seen on Kirby's plan. A similar gabled treatment of the pulpit still exists at Canterbury Blackfriars and formerly existed at Denny, an abbey of Franciscan nuns. The position of the pulpit indicates that the 'high' end of the refectory was to the north, and it is noticeable that the window in the sixth bay from the north is simpler than the rest and that the seventh bay has no window at all, perhaps indicating a screen passage and a division into buttery and pantry at the south end, which would not need to read visually with the refectory proper.

Kirby's prospect and plan both show the north wall of the refectory projecting westwards for several feet, with a ruined end. This could have been the south wall of the porter's lodge and parlour or room for the reception of visitors, occupying its normal place at the north end of the west range.

On the north side of the cloister garth Kirby shows a low but substantial wall ending in a small tower abutting the east claustral range. Points worthy of notice are the fact that the tower measures no more than some 14ft × 16ft externally, that it has archways in its north and south walls, and that the east claustral range overlaps the cloister northwards so that its north wall is a continuation of the north wall of the tower.

The distinctive form of most churches of the mendicant Orders built in England after the middle of the 13th century, when early regulations governing the size of their buildings had been relaxed, is now well known (Clapham, 1913 and 1927). They generally had a long, aisleless choir ending at the west with two transverse walls each pierced by an arch and forming a sort of passage across the church. Beyond this passage or 'walking-place' was the nave, usually aisled, with broad arcades and slender piers to offer a minimum of obstruction to the large congregations gathered to listen to the preaching. As the walking-place provided

access from the conventual buildings to the choir, it was placed opposite the east walk of the cloister. This meant that, unlike the older monastic Orders whose cloisters fitted neatly into the re-entrant angle of nave and transept and whose east claustral range only started beyond the end of the transept, the mendicant Orders usually had aisled naves that failed to cover the cloister by the width of the walking-place, their east claustral ranges projected north of the cloister to reach their aisleless choirs, and a short passage was needed to link the cloister to the walking-place (Fig. 7).

These are exactly the conditions shown on Kirby's plan, where the north wall of the east range can indicate the position of the south wall of the missing aisleless choir, the tower represents the space needed for the passage from cloister to walking-place, and the north wall of the cloister garth can be equated with the south wall of the south aisle of the missing nave. One can go further than this with the aid of plans provided by Dr Blatchly. Some idea of the proportions of the nave can be obtained from Ogilby's map of Ipswich of 1674 which shows a space enclosed by walls extending to the street, in all probability a 17th-century property boundary that still perpetuated the memory of the destroyed nave. Even more useful as a clue is the behaviour of the parish boundary of St Mary-at-Quay (Fig. 8) for this not only suggests (perhaps more accurately than Ogilby) an area of about 135ft \times 55ft for nave and walking-place combined, but its two return angles as it goes eastwards can be taken as sketching the boundaries of an aisleless choir measuring some 58ft \times 26ft, the whole providing a most acceptable outline for a normal mendicant church. Before it turns southwards to reduce the width of the aisled nave to that of the aisleless choir, this parish boundary covers the width of the hypothetical walking-place, which may therefore have been included in the structural nave (as at Lichfield Greyfriars) instead of in the structural choir as is more common.

On the southern and last side of the cloister garth Kirby shows a thick wall with a doorway near its east end. A view of this same wall published in 1845 by Russel and Hagreen also shows a blocked archway with segmental-pointed head near the west end of the wall, corresponding with a recess in the south wall of the refectory on Kirby's plan. So this is probably the south wall of the south claustral range, and if a north wall is supplied to give the range a width similar to that of its neighbours this reduces the cloister garth from the elongated rectangle of Kirby's plan to a more acceptably square shape. It also serves to explain the absence of the creasing for the roof of the east alley of the cloister towards the south end of the east range, where it would have returned westwards.⁴

Before looking at the site of Christ's Hospital it remains to consider the possible functions of some parts of the claustral ranges for which a purpose has not already been suggested, and here it is necessary to keep in mind the differences between the organisation of houses of monks on the one hand and houses of friars on the other, and their different requirements in accommodation.

From the beginning it was the intention of the Dominicans not only to maintain the *Opus Dei*—the round of services in the choirs of their churches—but also to devote much of their effort to preaching to layfolk as a means of encouraging confession and combating heresy. Nor was this preaching left to chance; friars properly trained in the subjects regarded as essential for this purpose in the Middle Ages were an absolute requirement. Education therefore loomed large in the programme of all Dominican houses, for they were intended to be missionary centres for the activities of preachers and schools for their training. The earliest Constitutions of the Order require every house to have a resident doctor of theology (Hinnebusch, 1951, 140), and in the course of the 13th century one can see the system developed until, after receiving a grounding in theology in his own house, the friar who proved himself

an apt pupil might be sent on to continue his education at other friaries in the province that specialised in other subjects, and finally to a *studium generale* in one of the five houses at first set apart in the countries of western Europe for education at university level, from which he eventually graduated as a master of theology (Hinnebusch, 1951, ch. xviii).

Besides the prior, the friars who proved unsuitable for training as preachers, and a handful of laybrothers, the average Dominican house therefore had to find room and suitable quarters for the friars who were still being trained and for the finished product—the friars licensed as ‘preachers in ordinary’ operating within the territory allotted to their own house, and those licensed as ‘preachers general’ operating throughout the province. Taking Fr Hinnebusch’s rough calculation of the proportions of these various classes of friars in an average house (1951, 331) and applying it to the numerical strength at Ipswich (1951, 274) it is probable that provision for as many as 25 students and preachers would have to be made there. These specialised needs could not be met within the framework of the traditional plans of the older Orders of monks, and to cope with them the friars made use of three types of building, two of which were not used on the same scale or in the same way by the monks.

The first of these three was the common dormitory or dorter usually placed, as in the houses of the older Orders, on the first floor of the east claustral range. There can be little doubt that this is where it was at Ipswich, and an excellent internal view of 1830⁵ shows it refenestrated towards the west and provided with a hammer-beam roof in post-Dissolution times, but still retaining the large traceried window in its south gable that characterises some other friars’ dorters.⁶

The second was the study-dormitory divided into cubicles where individual friars could study and sleep. Gloucester Blackfriars which, like Ipswich, had a common dorter in the east range and a frater in the west range, still retains a fine study-dorter on the first floor of its south range, and if one existed at Ipswich this is where it would most likely be found.

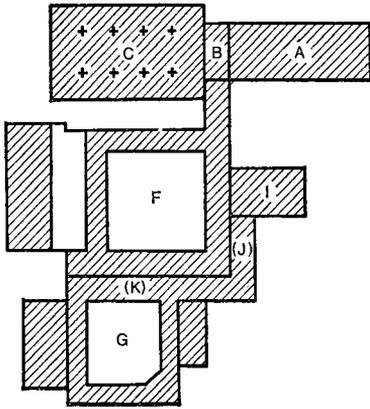
The third was the provision of private chambers or cells. Remains of three of these, each with its own fireplace, have survived on the first floor of the south range of Boston Blackfriars.

Bearing these types of accommodation in mind, one can move southwards from the area of the main claustral buildings of Ipswich Blackfriars into the area of Christ’s Hospital, and here it must be admitted that even hypothesis has to be left behind and pure speculation has to take its place, for the views and plans of the Hospital⁷ show that the greater part of it must have been built or rebuilt after the Dissolution. Nevertheless, there are elements in its plan that are highly suggestive, and one may perhaps be forgiven for guessing that they may be an echo of earlier buildings serving a different purpose.

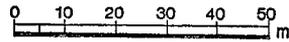
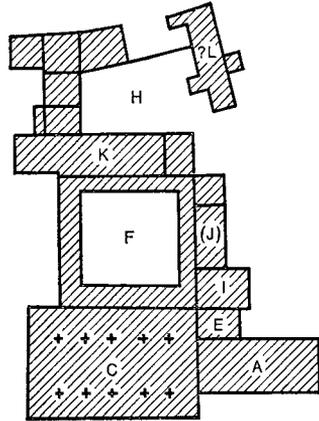
The most obvious point about the Hospital and the Bridewell is that they shared a claustral layout of their own, with cloister alleys of two storeys which, as time went on, were subject on the north and south-west to a process of cannibalisation to provide more rooms. It is noticeable that the north and south alleys of the cloister are roofed independently of the adjoining buildings, whilst the east and probably the west alleys share the roofs of the narrow ranges behind them.

Now the mendicant Orders on the Continent very often used a second and even a third cloister as a means of regularising the additional ranges of cells, private chambers, lecture rooms and libraries needed for their trainees and their preachers. In England, unfortunately, research has tended to concentrate on the churches and main claustral buildings of the friaries, and it is not always known what may or may not have lain outside those limits. But at Cardiff Blackfriars and Norwich Blackfriars rather irregular groups of buildings form courtyards beyond the main cloister (Fig. 7), whilst at Walsingham Greyfriars and London Blackfriars courtyards in this same position have become regular second cloisters (Fig. 7). The whole

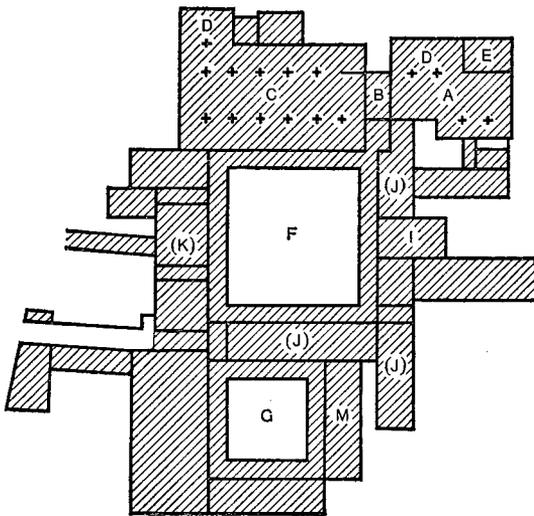
WALSINGHAM GREYFRIARS



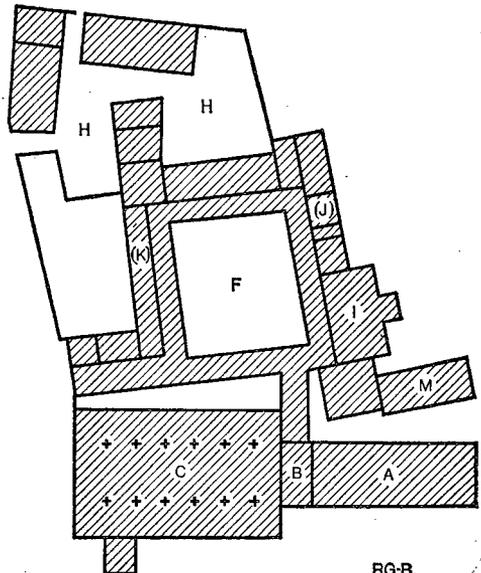
CARDIFF BLACKFRIARS



LONDON BLACKFRIARS



NORWICH BLACKFRIARS



RG-B
1978

FIG. 7—Outline plans of four mendicant houses. A, choir; B, walking-place; C, nave; D, chapel; E, sacristy; F, cloister; G, second cloister; H, courtyard; I, chapter house; J, dorter; K, frater; L, farmery; M, library.

arrangement at Ipswich is reminiscent of this and, if one is prepared to look outside England, the narrow east and west ranges of Christ's Hospital with their division into small rooms and their two-storeyed cloister galleries are also reminiscent of some mendicant houses on the Continent, for instance the 15th-century second cloister attributed to Brunelleschi with its two-storeyed ranges of galleries and chambers in the Franciscan house of Santa Croce in Florence.

The survival until 1845 of a two-storeyed building measuring about 58ft × 32ft with diagonal buttresses and stone walls 2ft gins thick, occupying part of the south side of the cloister of Christ's Hospital, shows that the buildings of the Blackfriars had extended over this area by the 14th century. At Bristol Blackfriars a building of almost the same dimensions occupies the same position on the south side of what is thought to have been a second cloister, and it has been suggested that it was the infirmary or farmery of that friary, an identification that would also suit the Ipswich example.

The sequence of events at Ipswich could therefore have been the creation of an open courtyard south of the main cloister by the 14th century, bounded on the north by the study-dorter and on the south by a detached farmery, perhaps with its necessary herb garden on the site of the garden shown by Kirby, followed later in the Middle Ages by the building of narrow east and west ranges suitable for cells or private chambers, the whole provided with two-storeyed alleys to form a second cloister, the roofs of which had to be independent where they abutted on the earlier buildings to the north and south, but could be included with those of the new ranges on the east and west.

West of all this, a range projecting westwards and then returning southwards may just possibly keep the memory of the late medieval prior's lodging and guest houses.

This article has not attempted to do more than correct a couple of misconceptions and sketch what may have been the main outlines of the buildings of Ipswich Blackfriars. It has to be remembered that there is also evidence⁸ for the existence of buildings to the east of the eastern range of the main cloister and that these had vanished before Kirby drew his plan. Their rediscovery below ground could easily modify theories that have been advanced above.

Indeed, so much speculation may savour of making bricks with far too little straw, and it may well be that some day adequate excavation will prove some or all of these theories to be wrong. Yet it has seemed worthwhile to put them on paper, for at best they may save future excavators time by suggesting specific lines of enquiry and at worst, if all are wrong, we shall still have to admit that, in comparing the building practice of the medieval friars with a factual survey drawn two hundred years after they had gone by a man who knew nothing of that practice, we have been in the presence of a highly remarkable set of coincidences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Dr J. M. Blatchly for reinforcing the evidence contained in Kirby's prospect and plan by communicating to me a number of other plans, maps and views of the site between the 17th and 19th centuries. Wherever these are mentioned in the text, it should be understood that they are all due to Dr Blatchly's kindness. I have also benefitted from discussion with him and with Mr D. A. Sherlock.

The outline plans are adapted from the following: Walsingham, A. R. Martin, *Franciscan architecture in England*, 1937; Cardiff, J. P. Conway in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5th series, vi; London, I. Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse*, 1964; Norwich, F. C. Elliston Erwood in *Archaeological Journal*, cvii.

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NOTES

- ¹ The English Dominicans have been the subject of a particularly valuable study by Fr Hinnebusch (1951) For the architecture of the mendicant Orders in general, Clapham, 1927 and 1913; for the Dominicans, Meersseman, 1946; for the Franciscans, Martin, 1937.
- ² Wrong placing of the church in Hinnebusch, 1951, 133n. and 137; wrong placing of the refectory in Pevsner, 1961, 278.
- ³ For example, the Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx in Yorkshire, the Augustinian abbaye de la Réau in Vienne, and more commonly in Italy.
- ⁴ It is just possible, but less likely, that this may have been the north wall of the south range.
- ⁵ 'Interior of the Grammar School, Ipswich', drawn by J. Hare, engraved by J. F. Lambert, pub. S. Piper, Ipswich, 1830.
- ⁶ For example, Coventry Whitefriars and Newcastle Blackfriars.
- ⁷ The interpretation that follows is based on Kirby, on Fuller's more detailed plan of c. 1840, and on Russel and Hageen's views of c. 1842 published in 1845.
- ⁸ Again communicated by Dr Blatchly. Among the buildings so far unidentified that may have lain on this side of the friary would perhaps be the reredorter or latrines.

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