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Whitefriars Gate, 36-37 Much Park Street, Coventry: Historic Building Assessment

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WHITEFRIARS GATE
36-37 MUCH PARK STREET
COVENTRY

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

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SUMMARY
Whitefriars Gate is a Grade II* listed building, currently on the Heritage at Risk Register. An investigation of the building was undertaken by Architectural Investigators from Historic England in 2017, to provide an understanding of the building to inform proposed restoration work. This has identified that the original gatehouse dates from the late 14th or 15th century, with a significant phase of alteration in the 16th century and further alterations in the 17th, 18th and 20th centuries.

CONTRIBUTORS
The report was written by Rebecca Lane. Survey work was undertaken by Rebecca Lane and Johanna Roethe. Photography was by James O. Davies.

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ARCHIVE LOCATION
The report archive is held in the Historic England Archive, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon, SN2 2EH

DATE OF INVESTIGATION
The main phase of survey work was undertaken on the 5 and 6 December 2017, with an inital report produced in April 2018. The report was updated following dendrochronological work on the building issued in May 2020. The final report was desktop published in February 2022.

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INTRODUCTION

Whitefriars Gate is a Grade II* listed building (NHLE 1087114), which has been on the Heritage at Risk Register since 2014. Ownership of the gatehouse has recently passed from Coventry City Council to the Historic Coventry Trust, who are seeking funds to restore the site. To inform this process, and as part of Historic England's Heritage Action Zone programme in Coventry, the building was investigated by Architectural Investigators from Historic England.

As part of the research to inform this investigation dendrochronological sampling of timbers from the building was undertaken (Arnold et al. 2020). Only one timber was successfully dated, which provided a likely early 16th-century date. The implications of this are discussed in the building analysis.

Whitefriars Gate now stands in relative isolation on Much Park Street, with larger office blocks set back from the street surrounding it, predominantly housing various Coventry University departments (Figure 1). Originally however, it sat within a built-up street front, part of a continuous row of properties of various dates. This street pattern was established prior to the construction of the gate, and continued up until the Second World War and the systematic replanning of Coventry city centre which followed. S. M. Wright has suggested that the area of Much Park Street had a suburban character in the 12th and 13th centuries, and was more intensively developed, and became urban, in the 14th century (Wright 1982, 14). This pattern of settlement was also seen in excavated evidence of the site immediately south of the Whitefriars Gate, which observed the formalising of plot sizes, and the construction of buildings, mostly timber framed on stone footings, in the 14th century (Colls and Mitchell 2013, 131). The area appears to have been particularly associated with metal working (ibid.; Wright 1982, 23).

It is important to bear this street pattern in mind, as some of the confusing aspects of the building's layout appear to be related to the process, common in many towns, of expansion, subdivision and amalgamation which can unite disparate elements in a street, and divide those of common origin.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

The Carmelites, commonly referred to as the Whitefriars, were founded in Palestine in the 12th century as an eremitical order, but they were refounded as a preaching order in the 13th century under Pope Gregory IX. They were known as the Whitefriars, distinguished by the colour of their habits - which differentiated them from the Greyfriars (Franciscans) and Blackfriars (Dominicans). The first English Carmelite house was founded at Hulne in Northumberland around 1240, and there were a further 40 houses founded in the following century, with Coventry one of the last foundations in 1342.

The foundation of the Coventry Carmelite friary was endowed by Sir John Poulteney (d. 1349) a wealthy draper whose family came from the Coventry area (Woodfield ed. 2005, 2). He was four times Lord Mayor of London and also endowed religious

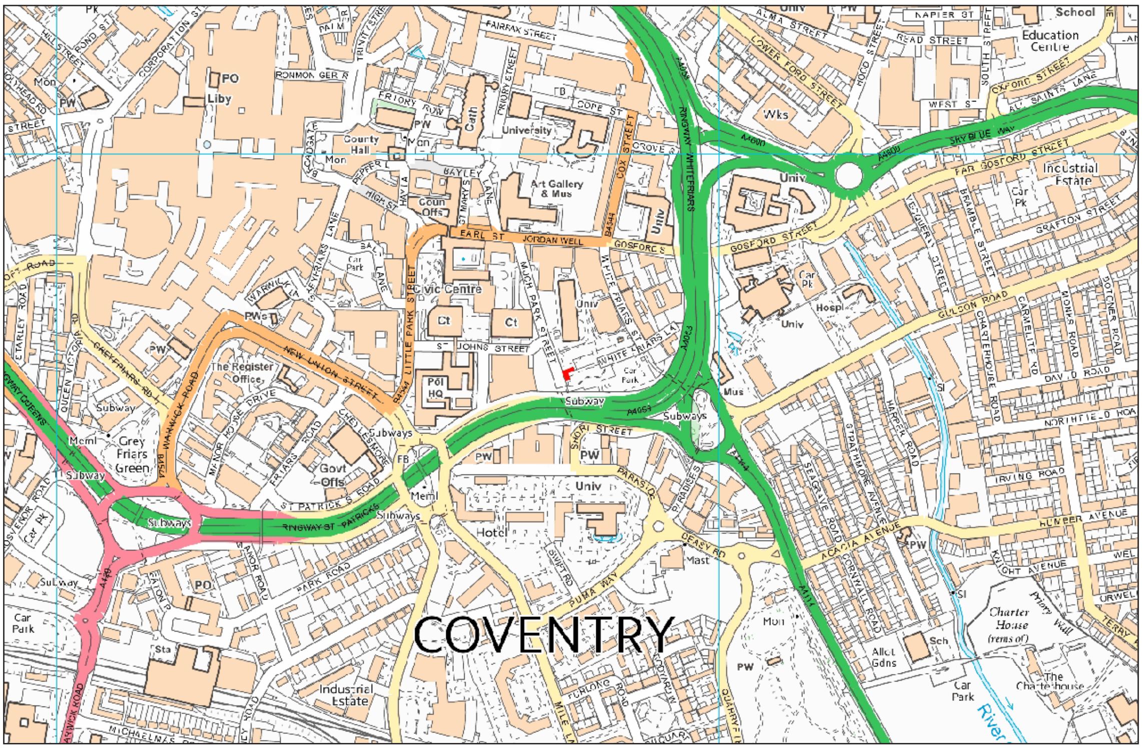

Figure 1 Location map. Whitefriars Gate is marked in red, fronting onto Much Park Street, with Whitefriars Lane running north east from Much Park Street. [Base map © Crown Copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved. Ordnance survey Licence number 100024900]

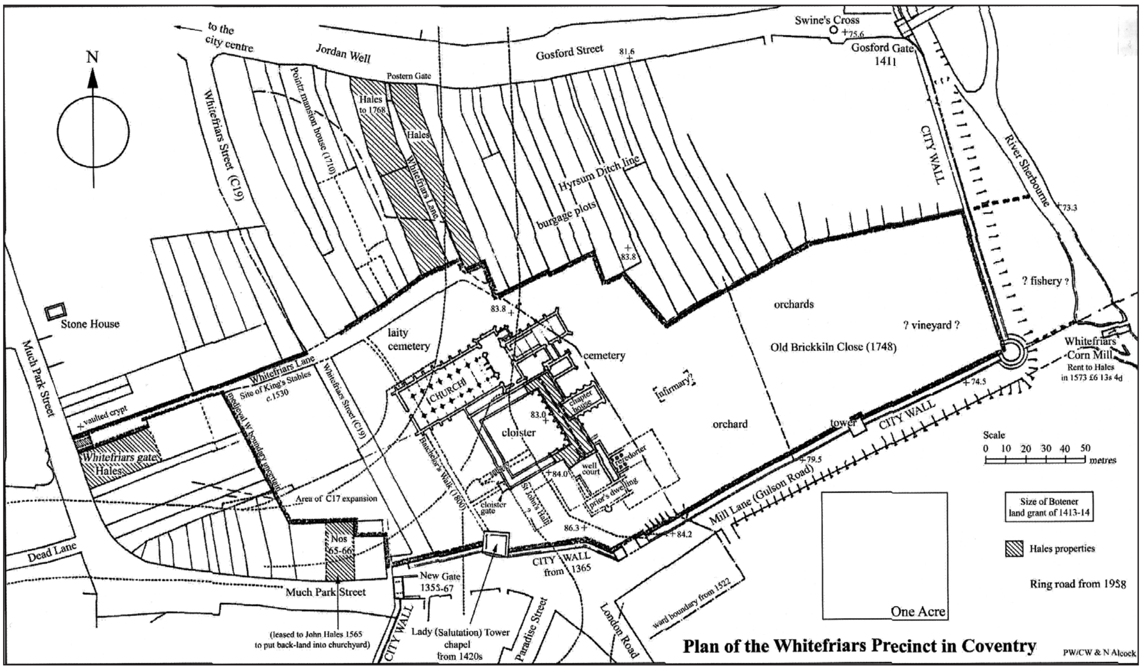

Figure 2 Plan of the Whitefriars Precinct (from Woodfield ed. 2005, 96), with the path of the future ring road shown as a dashed line. [Reproduced courtesy of Culture Coventry PA2642/6/1]

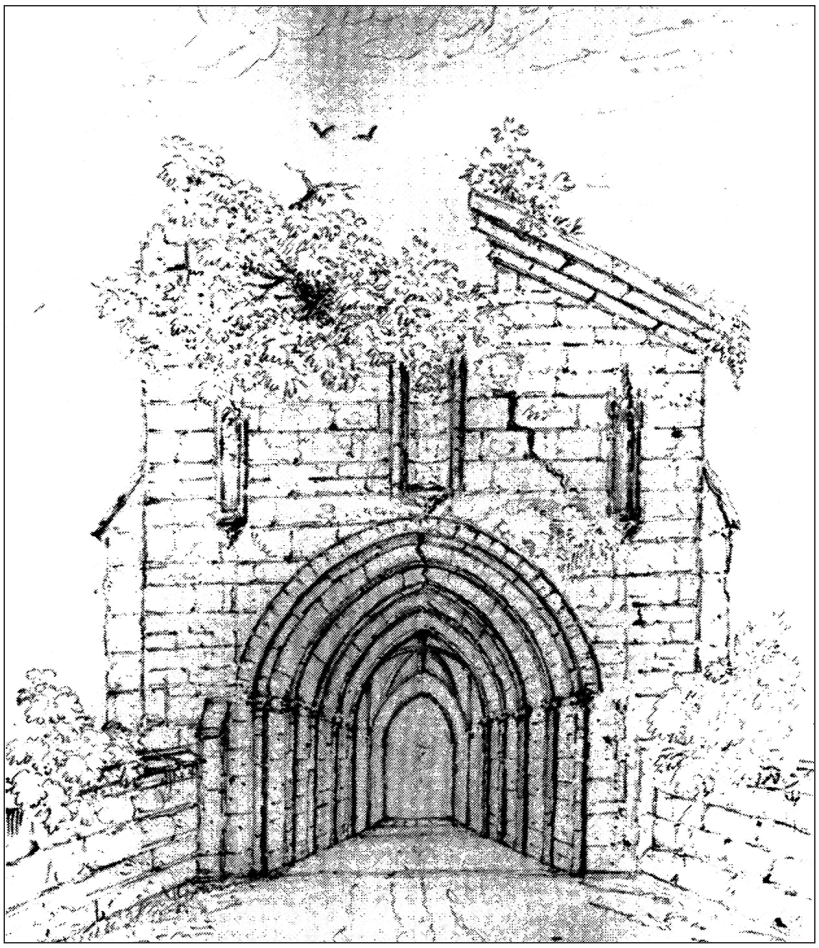

Figure 3 Nathaniel Troughton's 1907 sketch of the 14th-century cloister gatehouse. [Reproduced courtesy of Culture Coventry PA1/10/13]

establishments in the capital. By the 14th century Coventry was a heavily built up urban settlement and, as was the case in other towns, the Whitefriars were forced to take a site on the edge of the settlement. The site, to the south-east of the town centre, was gifted to them by the main Benedictine Priory in Coventry in 1343 (ibid., 3). The Carmelites appear to have commenced building a substantial monastic complex, of conventional form, soon after they acquired the land (Cattell 1997; Figure 2). They acquired further land from the Crown in 1344 (Woodfield ed. 2005, 3). In 1352, again from the Crown, the Carmelites purchased additional land to enlarge the area of the precinct, and also purchased a toft on Much Park Street to allow access to the street from the precinct (ibid.). Construction of the main precinct took place in a series of phases from the mid-14th to the mid-15th century, with major elements of the conventual church and other buildings completed as and when endowments or other financial windfalls allowed (ibid.).

Mark Singlehurst (2000, 1) has suggested that the main access to the friary would originally have been from the London Road to the south of the complex, which was one of the principal routes into the city. A gatehouse was constructed at the south-west corner of the cloister in the 14th century, probably in association with the construction of the main cloister ranges (Woodfield ed. 2005, 54-5; Figure 3). Its position supports Singlehurst's suggestion of the main approach being from the south, as it would have been well positioned to provide access from the London

Road. Although no longer surviving, the form of the gatehouse is known from illustrations of the building prior to its demolition in 1956. It appears to have been typical of Carmelite or other monastic gates in this period – with very similar features to the examples surviving in King's Lynn and Stamford, including a vaulted gate passage and a symmetrical façade with three decorative niches which must originally have held statues.

As well as the presumed principal route from the south, there was also a route into the precinct from the north, via a lane from Gosford Street, roughly in the position of the current Whitefriars Lane. Comparison with other urban friaries (see for example Holder 2017) suggests in fact that multiple access routes were common: Greyfriars in London was accessed via no fewer than four different gateways (ibid.). Assuming that the original primary access route was via London Road to the south, then the construction of the city walls from the 1420s cut off the main access to the precinct. It has been suggested therefore that it may have been following the construction of the city walls that the access route to the site via Much Park Street gained prominence (Singlehurst 2000, 1), although it may have provided a secondary access point from the mid-14th century onwards.

There is very little documentary information surviving on the Whitefrairs' complex in the medieval period. While excavation has clarified the extent and form of the main church and associated cloister, there is little indication of the layout of the outer elements of the complex and any of the ancillary functions or features that the gatehouse might have contained.

Post-Dissolution

The Carmelite Friary was dissolved in 1538, by which time there were few brethren living on the site (Cattell 1997, 8). Initially the complex was put forward as a suitable site for municipal use, but in 1544 it was sold to a prominant MP and royal official John Hales (1516-72), who converted part of the former cloister into a substantial mansion house (Woodfield ed. 2005, 8-9). The gatehouse appears to have remained part of this holding. The Hales family retained the complex until the early 18th century, although it was probably not used as a residence for much of the later part of their ownership (Cattell 1997, 9). It is not clear what function the gatehouse had in this period, although it can be presumed that the passageway would still have been used as a principal access point. Speed's map of Coventry in 1610 shows Whitefriars Lane but no gatehouse structure over the western end of the lane (Figure 4). This may be an error in creation, or possibly it was omitted for clarity in showing the road network through the town.

Various attempts to trace the subsequent documentary history of the gatehouse have been made. These have traced the ownership of the site through a series of deeds, but give little indication of how it was actually being used before the 19th century. There is some suggestion that the gatehouse was considered a separate holding from the main elements of Hales's mansion house by the 17th century. A 1669 lease apparently made reference to a 'stone gatehouse, stables and outhouses in Much Park Street', in the occupation of a Mr Skeers (Singlehurst 2000, 3 citing

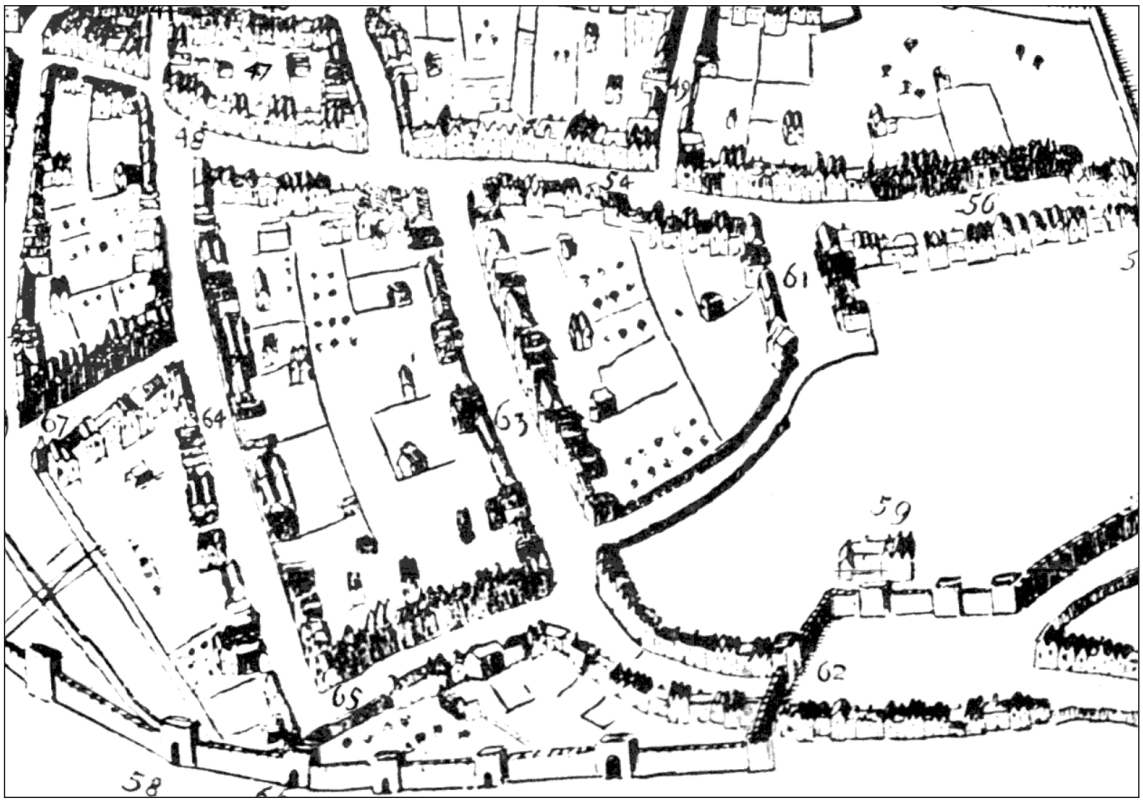

Figure 4 Extract from Speed's 1610 map of Coventry. Whitefriars Lane (61) is shown running from Much Park Street (63), but the gatehouse is not depicted.

deeds from Coventry Record Office BA/D/L/13/2). The gatehouse appears to have been retained by the Hales family after they sold the main Whitefriars site in 1717. In 1768 the gatehouse was sold by John Hales's descendant Sir Christopher Hales to Joseph Catell (ibid.). Thomas Jeffrey's map of Coventry in 1748-9 clearly indicates Whitefriars Lane, although again no structure is shown spanning the western end of the route (Figure 5). Comparison with the rest of Much Park Street, however, suggests that this was a mapping convention, as cut throughs and alleyways to rear plots are all shown as gaps in the street front, despite the fact that all of these were almost certainly oversailed by the buildings around them. The depiction of buildings to either side of the lane suggests that by this date the gatehouse had building ranges extending to the rear (east of the property) along Whitefriars Lane, although leaving the main gateway clear.

In 1801 the Whitefriars site was sold and become the city's poor law institution (Woodfield ed. 2005, 10). It is unclear whether this sale included the gatehouse, but the conversion of the gatehouse into dwellings is commonly attributed to this period (Singlehurst 2000, 3). It was leased by a series of tenants and appears to have been used as a commercial premises as well as for residential occupation throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century (ibid.). Depictions on the Board of Health map of 1851 and early Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping clearly show the gatehouse structure with a series of extensions to the rear. By the 1930s the gatehouse appears to have been empty and in need of repair.

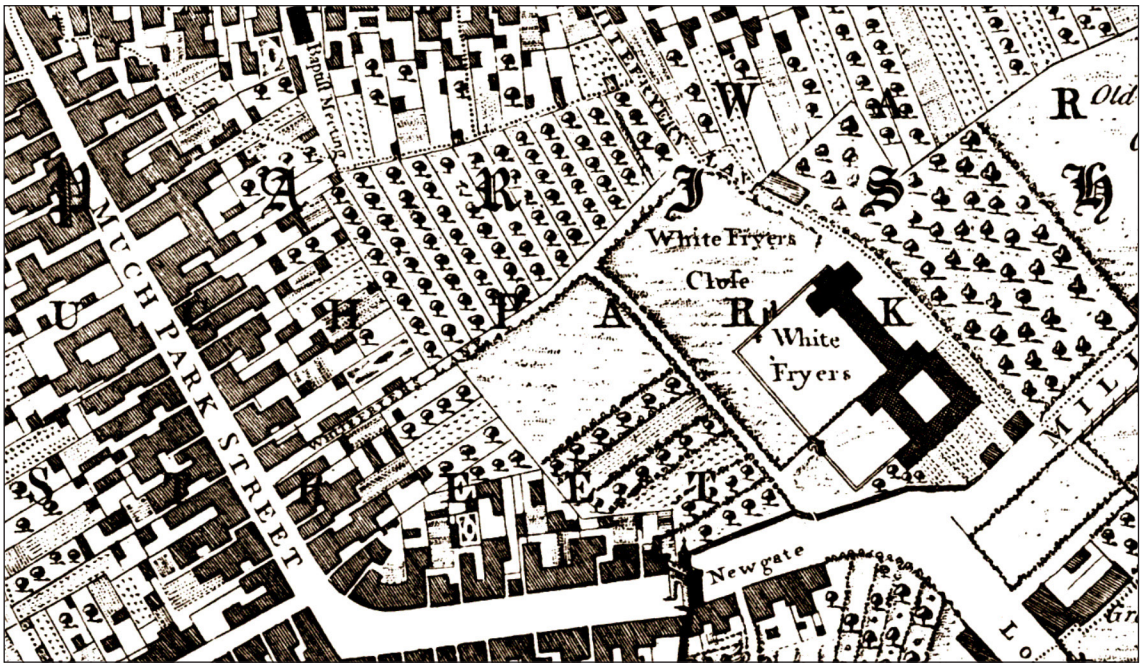

Figure 5 Extract from Thomas Jeffrey's map of Coventry 1748-9. The remains of the Whitefriars complex is shown, with Whitefriars Lane running north east off Much Park Street. No gatehouse is depicted over the entrance to the lane, but this appears to be a convention used to aid legibility.

Much Park Street was damaged by bombing in the Second World War, and saw almost total clearance as part of the laying out of the post-war city (Gould and Gould 2016, 76). The gatehouse was the only building on the street retained in situ as part of this process. Other more fragmentary early buildings in the street were cleared, and one building was relocated in its entirety to Spon Street (ibid., 78).

The inner ring road, constructed between 1962 and 1971, which passes just 25m to the south of the site, divided the gatehouse from the other surviving elements of the Whitefriars complex. The one surviving range of the main claustral complex now sits immediately to the south of the ring road. The gatehouse remained empty until in 1962 it was leased by a local councillor, Ron Morgan, who restored the building (Singlehurst 2000, 4). It opened as a Toy Museum in 1973. Morgan lived in the building until he died in 2007, from which time the main building has been empty. A cafe which occupied the north-east range of the site was subject to arson in 2008. It was restored, but has also been empty since that date.

Previous Research

The significant redevelopment of Much Park Street and the surrounding area in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has prompted a significant amount of archaeological excavation which has covered much of the eastern and western sides. The publication of these excavation reports has seen the close study of the evolution of the street from the medieval period onwards (see for example Colls and Mitchell 2013). Documentary research carried out as part of this process provided some context on the construction of the gatehouse, as one element of the medieval street,

although the gatehouse building itself has not been subject to any systematic analysis as part of this work.

The construction of the inner ring road in the 1960s also provided the opportunity to fully excavate the demolished elements of the main ranges of the friary – principally the monastic church which had been dismantled in the 16th century. This archaeological work was not published at the time, but in the 1990s its findings were reviewed and it was eventually issued as a British Archaeological Report (Woodfield ed. 2005). As part of this revision, and in order to provide a holistic understanding of the Whitefriars complex, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) was asked to examine the surviving cloister range (Cattell 1997), and the gatehouse was the subject of analysis by Paul Woodfield (Woodfield 2005). This analysis concluded that much of the surviving building was of the 15th century, including the east and west walls and the roof structure.

Further documentary analysis of the site was carried out by Mark Singlehurst in 2000 (Singlehurst 2000). As part of this, it was suggested that originally the structure had comprised only the west elevation, forming a stone screen wall to create an impressive facade, but providing no further accommodation. This theory was supported by George Demidowicz in his book on Coventry buildings published in 2003 (Demidowicz 2003). A full measured survey of the building was undertaken in 2008 to inform proposals for reuse. This did not include any further analysis of the building, but the drawings have been used as part of this building investigation.

BUILDING ANALYSIS

Whitefriars Gate is orientated with its principal elevation fronting south west towards Much Park Street. For the purposes of the report, however, it has been described as aligned with the main cardinal compass points, with the main elevation fronting to the west. Plans of the building at ground-, first- and second-floor level have been provided to assist in identifying key features (Figures 6, 7 and 8). These are based on original drawings created by Acanthus Clews Architects for Coventry City Council in 2008. The main elements discussed in the text are annotated on the plans.

The gatehouse functioned as two separate units for much of its history, probably from the 16th century until the mid-20th century. By the 20th century these units were numbered as 36 and 37 Much Park Street. This numbering has been used in the later parts of this description to help to distinguish the evolution of the two units, particularly in relation to alterations which combined the gatehouse with elements of the adjacent properties on Much Park Street.

Phase One – Late 14th or 15th Century: Construction of the Gatehouse

The original construction of the gatehouse appears to have taken place in the late 14th or 15th century. There is some uncertainty over the precise date of construction. Documentary evidence indicates that the toft on Much Park Street was purchased by the Carmelites in the 1352, and it is thus possible that construction took place at any point from that date onwards (Woodfield ed. 2005, 3). Previous analyses have placed its construction in the 15th century (see Woodfield 2005; Cattell 1997); however, this is based on the stylistic evidence of the principal archway and the timber framing. This report suggests that the vast majority of the timber framing within the current building is considerably later, albeit potentially reusing medieval fabric *(see below)*. The arch alone provides much weaker stylistic evidence; its form could be consistent with the 15th century, but could in fact be somewhat earlier. Moreover, the partial survival of several shoulder-headed openings within the building are consistent with features inserted into the east cloister of the Whitefriars, dated by the RCHME analysis of the cloister to the 1370s (Cattell 1997, 19). Comparison with Carmelite gates surviving elsewhere in England could also suggest parallels in the late 14th century, particularly that at King's Lynn; here again the evidence is largely stylistic, although potentially confirmed by evidence for associated 14th century precinct walling (Gurney and Hoggett 2009). On the basis of existing evidence a precise date cannot be arrived at, but the possibility of the gatehouse being of the late 14th century must be considered.

Much about the original form of the gatehouse is uncertain due to later alterations, but as originally constructed it appears to have comprised a rectangular structure, defined by the surviving east and west walls. It probably extended further to the north (*see below*). Its original southern extent is unknown. As constructed it included the main archway, and possibly pedestrian access through to the complex, as well as limited ground-floor space and some form of associated first-floor accommodation. The east wall includes a large chimney stack which, although later modified, appears

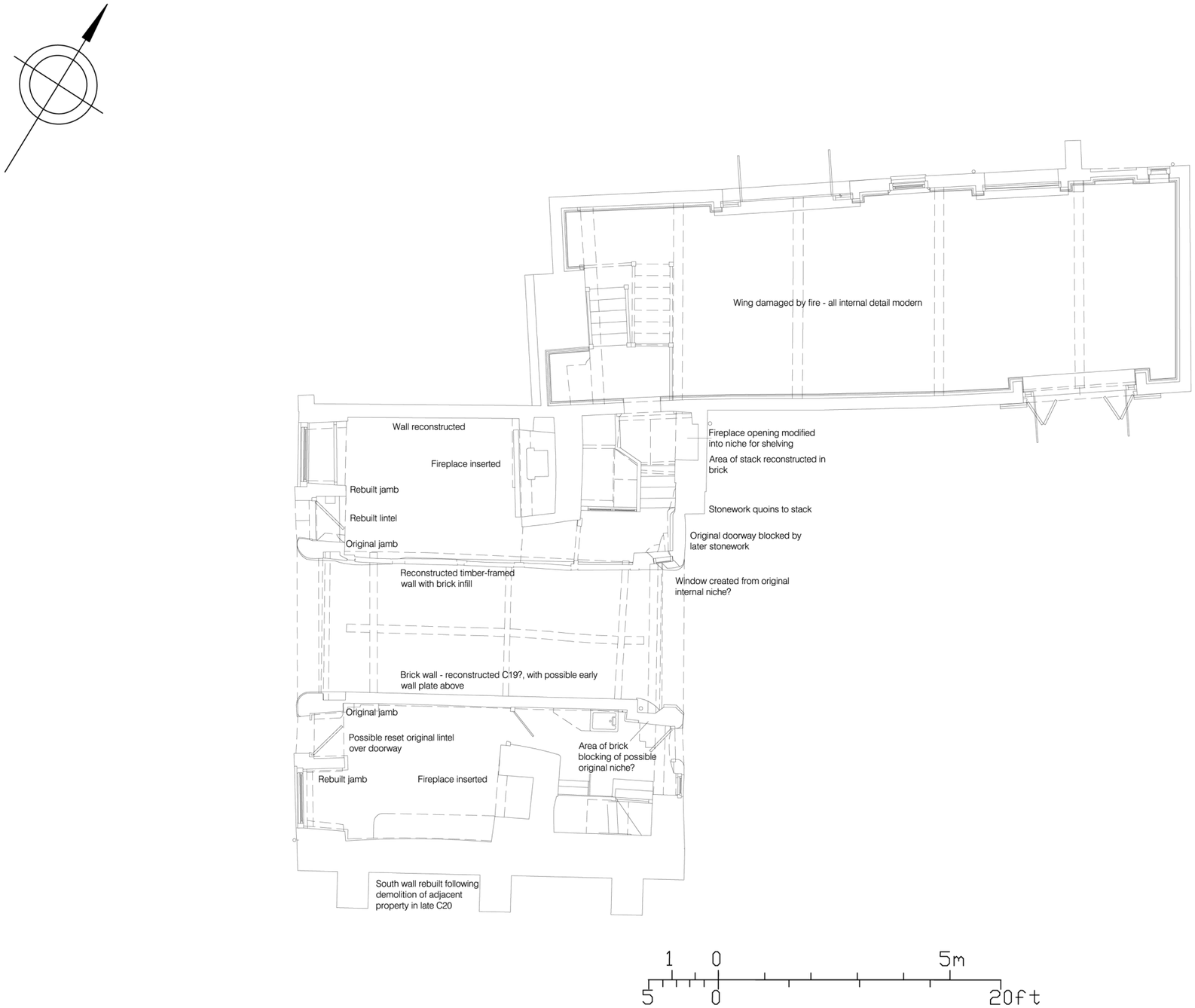

Figure 6 Ground-floor plan. Scale 1:100. [Based on survey drawings from Acanthus Clews Architects © Coventry City Council]

Figure 7 First-floor plan. Scale 1:100. [Based on survey drawings from Acanthus Clews Architects © Coventry City Council]

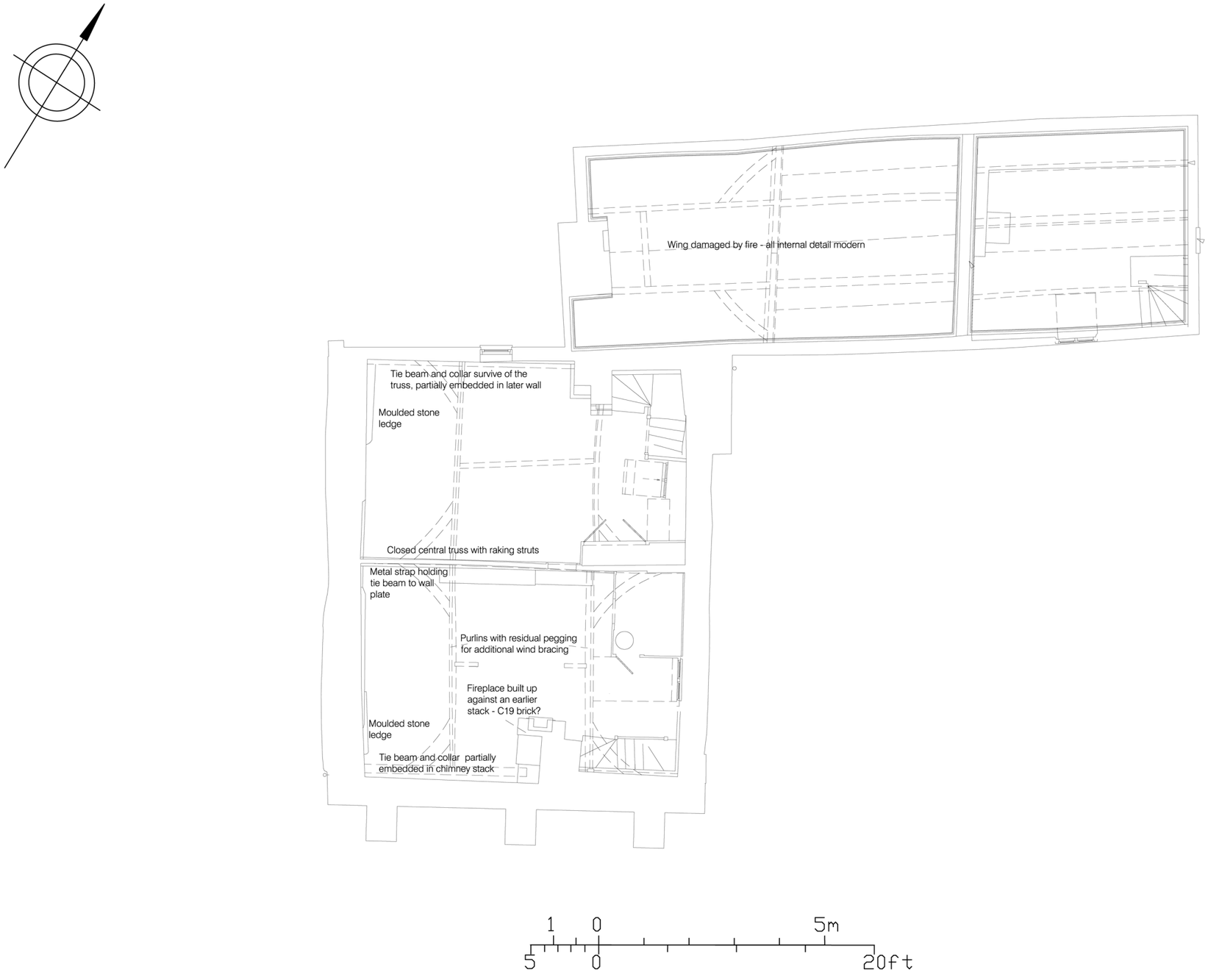

Figure 8 Second-floor plan. Scale 1:100. [Based on survey drawings from Acanthus Clews Architects © Coventry City Council]

Figure 9 West elevation. [DP219812]

to be part of the original form of the unit. This suggests that originally the gatehouse extended further north than the surviving building, as the current northern side of the stack is a later truncation of its original form.

The west (front) elevation appears to have originally comprised the large gateway arch, flanked by the two secondary doors, and by window openings beyond this (Figure 9). The gateway arch is the principal feature which dates the building stylistically. It is formed of red sandstone with a depressed four-centred arch with a deep cavetto moulding typical of the late 14th or early 15th century. The doorway and window openings flanking the archway are formed of the same red sandstone and form part of the same phase, their lintels being carefully accommodated in the jamb stones of the main arch. The southern doorway has a square head with a large sandstone lintel. The lintel is relatively worn, but enough survives to indicate that there appears to have been no moulding around the opening. The northern doorway is of later stone externally, but internally the stonework around the entrance appears to indicate it is an original opening, matching the corresponding stonework of the southern doorway. It now has a depressed four-centred head, differing from that to the south, although it is not clear whether this corresponds to its original form.

On the outer side of each doorway is a window opening. Again these appear to reflect original features, although the current wide openings are later. That to the south has a lintel formed of red sandstone with a simple chamfer moulding surviving

along its lower edge, returning at both ends to indicate the outer edge of the original opening. The returns indicate that originally the window opening was narrower than the current opening – and would have been only around 0.7m wide. The window opening to the north has a large lintel formed of a single slab of red sandstone. The lower edge of the lintel stone is worn but appears to have some suggestion of a chamfer moulding roughly corresponding with that to the south window, although without the clearly defined returns for the outer edges. Together with the internal evidence (*see below*) this suggests a window opening of the same form and proportions as that to the south.

Above the ground floor the upper elevation is principally formed of green sandstone, with a band of red sandstone running across the elevation at the level of the springing of the main archway (*see* Figure 9). The red sandstone thus appears to have been used on the front elevation for dressed stones around openings (thus its use across all of the lower part of the elevation) and as a decorative feature. This contrasts with the rear elevation (*see below*) where red sandstone has been used throughout. The reasons for this different use of the material are unclear. The features of the upper storey have been more significantly altered by later changes, but originally it appears there may have been narrow window openings directly over the ground-floor doorways. The evidence for these is principally internal, and will be discussed below.

The two red sandstone blocks that form the apex of the principal archway extend above the arch and form a level upper edge. Above this the green sandstone of the elevation is recessed. The blocks are extremely worn, but appear to curve inwards, and it seems likely that originally these blocks had a more pronounced moulding. It is possible that the recess was designed to hold a square panel. Such panels were typically associated with heraldry, however, which would be unlikely on a gatehouse to a friary. In the centre of the recessed section an area infilled with smaller pieces of stone may represent some form of later blocking of a niche feature. It is difficult to establish this with any certainty given the extremely worn nature of the stone, and the much later patching in of part of the area. It seems possible that this represents the position of a niche, originally designed to hold a statue. If that is the case then it seems likely that the elevation must originally have risen higher, as the area represented by the current recess is relatively low, and does not appear to provide sufficient space for a typically proportioned niche arrangement.

The only other original feature identifiable on the front elevation is a narrow feature to the south of the elevation, situated mid-way between ground- and first-floor level. This is now infilled with red sandstone, but this appears to be later packing, and originally this may have represented a lancet-type opening. Internally the area is obscured, so it is not possible to establish whether it ran the full depth of the wall to form a window, or whether it was associated with some sort of recessed feature only visible externally.

Figure 10 East elevation showing the main archway, the blocked north doorway and the truncated chimney stack. The south doorway is obscured. [DP219945]

The east (rear) elevation of the gatehouse is formed almost entirely of squared red sandstone, with occasional green sandstone blocks, although these two stone types have not been used in any organised way as in the front elevation (Figure 10). The difference in the use of stone types between the east and west elevations has given rise to suggestions that the two elevations may in fact be different dates (Singlehurst 2000). However internal evidence, particularly from the west elevation, indicates that the gateway always functioned with a building behind it, and thus it seems more likely that it is in fact of the same date. The elevation comprises the principal archway with a simple chamfer moulding to its outer and inner faces. As with the west elevation the principal arch is flanked by two smaller doorway arches, which are thus directly in line with their counterparts on the front. That to the south has a four-centred arched head with a simple chamfer profile on its outer face (Figure 11). That to the north appears to have a square head, although it may have been altered by later blocking.

Immediately adjacent to the northern doorway are the truncated remains of a projecting chimney stack. This now mostly comprises later brickwork, but a series of stone quoins have survived as its southern edge. Immediately below the current roof level the stack narrows, with stone coping used on the slope of the top edge. These large coping stones appear to course through into the stone of the main elevation, indicating that the stack is in fact an original feature, although much modified. The

Figure 11 East elevation, south doorway. [DP219941]

precise form of the original stack is now difficult to establish, but unless it was very narrow then it seems likely to have extended further north than the current northern elevation of the building, strongly suggesting that originally the building ran further than its current northern extent.

The degree of later modification makes other original features in the east elevation hard to identify. In combination with the evidence visible internally, however, it seems possible to suggest that there is a blocked original window opening located above the northern doorway. This is immediately adjacent to the chimney stack, and appears to have been at an intermediate height between the ground and first floors. This window might suggest the presence of some form of stair internally although the precise arrangement of such a feature is hard to determine (*see* internal discussion).

Directly over the head of the principal arch the modern window appears to respect an original opening of the same width; the principal evidence for this is internal *(see below)*. No original window openings in the southern area of the elevation could be identified, although it is possible that the later window towards the south end at first-floor level is an adaptation of an original opening.

Figure 12 Interior, west elevation, ground floor, north room showing north doorway arrangement. [DP219917]

The lack of original stone side walls to the building has been commented on previously (Singlehurst 2000; Demidowicz 2003), and used to suggest that the structure was originally a screen wall. It is clear from the current analysis that the building originally extended further to the north, and possibly to the south as well. What survives is therefore truncated, and heavily altered. One possibility is that the original side walls were subsumed into other buildings, and subsequently demolished. However, stone walls were not identified in any adjacent buildings at any stage in the 20th century, which may suggest instead that the side walls were always of timber framing. If this was the case then it seems likely that this relates to the fact that the gatehouse was inserted into an existing street arrangement, which may have limited the scope of the builders to construct it as a single unit. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that the gatehouse ran up to the neighbouring properties on either side, rendering stone side walls an unnecessary expense as they would not have been visible on the approach to the gatehouse from either inside or outside the precinct.

Internally, later alterations have obscured much of the original detail in the west and east walls. At ground-floor level the openings in the west elevation have been heavily rebuilt (*see below*). However, the inner jambs of both doorways flanking the main archway are of similar form and may represent original fabric (Figures 12 and 13). These have a distinctive form. The head of the doorway curves inwards to form the spandrel of a shouldered arch, but the soffit of the arch curves upwards again in the centre to form what in effect appears like a small vaulted opening over the doorway. The example on the southern jamb of the north doorway is more pronounced

Figure 13 Interior, west elevation, ground floor, south room showing southern doorway arrangement. [DP219913]

than that on the northern jamb of the south doorway, but they both take the same overall form. Both also appear to have been cut back towards their outer faces to allow for the insertion of doors. There are no original rebates or other indications of door furniture, but it seems unlikely that they were originally permanently open archways, so some sort of provision for a door would be expected. The remainder of the openings around both doorways appear to have been heavily reconstructed (*see below*). A stone lintel to the southern doorway survives and may be original (*see* Figure 13). It has the remains of a chamfer visible on its outer edge, but is supported to the south by a later brick jamb, and appears to have been at least partly reset. The head over the northern doorway has been reconstructed in brick and timber at a later date.

Both flanking windows also take a similar form. That to the south represents a better survival (*see* Figure 13). The original south splay of the window opening appears to survive intact, as does perhaps the lintel. The splay is of ashlar stonework. The most distinctive element of the opening is the rounded corbels which project out from the splays to support the lintel. These have a simple chamfer decoration to their outer face. The lintel itself is concealed by the later ceiling, although it is presumed that the chamfer profile would have continued along the outer edge of the lintel. It is likely that the window openings have been altered and widened at a later date, so it is unclear how much of the rest of the internal window arrangement is original. Further investigation of the upper part of the windows may clarify this.

Figure 14 Interior, west elevation, first floor, south room. Note the remains of the eastern side of the principal arch exposed on the right-hand side of the photograph. [DP219907]

At first-floor level, sections of the upper part of the main archway are visible in the centre of the west elevation. Above the arch is a sloping off-set in the walling of the elevation, above which the stonework continues with no observable features. To the south of the archway the off-set continues, but at a lower level (Figure 14). Part of it appears to have been later altered (*see below*) but towards the southern end of the walling it sits approximately 1.2m above the current first-floor level, again with a sloping top. Above the lower off-set level is a window opening. Although later widened, the southern splay appears original and thus it can be suggested that there was an original, narrow window opening in the same position as the current window. South of this is a further wider recess, with a stone back. It has been suggested that this represents an original window position; however, there is no evidence of a blocked opening externally and the likely existence of a window immediately to the north makes this unlikely. Instead the feature may have formed a large cupboard originally. A narrow rebate running around the jambs of the opening and along its sill could represent the position of shutters or doors for the recess. The cupboard now has a square head, although it is not clear whether this represents its original shape or a later modification where the current first-floor ceiling has been inserted.

North of the main archway the interior of the west elevation has a similar form as that to the south, although with some small differences (Figure 15). Again there is an off-set running along the elevation at a lower level than that over the principal arch, and the off-set survives as a more consistent feature in this section, although altered around the window opening. As to the south, the outer (in this case the north) jamb of the window opening appears original, and probably indicates the position

Figure 15 Interior, west elevation, first floor, north room. [DP219900].

of an original, narrow window. To the north of this is a further recessed cupboard feature, of similar proportions as that to the south, but with a segmental-arched head, although it appears to have a square head further back in the recess (Figure 16). Again this has a rebate along its edges to allow for doors or shutters; deeper cuts at the top of the jambs of the cupboard opening may indicate the original position of hinges.

The only further features visible at attic level are two sections of projecting stonework, one towards the southern end of the elevation and one towards the northern end (Figures 17 and 18). They appear to sit roughly over the cupboard recesses below, although it is not clear if this relationship is significant. These comprise worked pieces of stone which are chamfered underneath forming short sections of what appears as a string course or drip course. As an internal feature, however, these two options are unlikely. Instead it is more likely that these were associated with the original roof structure of the building, as supports for a timber beam structure. Why they survive only towards the northern and southern ends of the elevation and not over the archway itself is a matter of some conjecture. But, as noted in the external description, it appears that the centre of the elevation may originally have risen higher than the surviving level, which may mean that the surviving central section has been truncated at the top in some way.

The interior of the east elevation of the building also has a number of original features, although again most of these have been subject to later alteration. The two flanking doorways survive, but much of the internal detail to the northern door has

Figure 16 Interior, west elevation, first floor, north room, detail of cupboard. [DP19904]

Figure 17 Interior, west elevation, second floor, south room showing projecting stonework towards the southern end of the elevation. [DP219891]

Figure 18 Interior, west elevation, second floor, north room, showing projecting stonework towards the north of the elevation. [DP219893]

been concealed by later stone blocking. That to the south has similarly been altered by later insertions. It is notable that both doorways sit tight against the jambs of the main west archway, and the stonework of the jamb forms in effect the inner sides of both door openings. To the south there is an area of brick blocking within the stonework of the door jamb at the level of the top of the doorway (Figure 19). The stonework around this seems carefully shaped to form an opening. However, there is no indication of a blocked window on the exterior of the archway in the same position. In roughly the same position on the northern jamb is a window opening. Externally this appears to have been cut into the stonework of the archway, but internally the stonework again appears to have been originally shaped to form an opening (Figure 20). It seems likely that originally both of these represented recesses or niches accessible from the interior of the building on both sides of the arch, but not window openings. The precise interpretation of these features is problematic as they sit relatively high in relation to the current (and presumed original) ground level. That would seem to preclude their use for storage, as they would not have been easily accessible.

Above the square-headed northern doorway a carefully shaped stone corbels out from the internal wall face (Figure 21). This has a chamfered lower edge and apparently a flat top, which supports a series of projecting stones. Immediately above the corbel this forms two rows of regular, coursed stonework, and then above this, rising towards the current ceiling level, are a series of more irregular stones which have clearly been cut back at a later date. What these stones originally related to is unclear. On the basis of comparison with other gatehouse structures of similar date,

Figure 19 Interior, east elevation, ground floor, south room, showing jamb of doorway and brick blocking. [DP219915]

Figure 20 Interior, east elevation, ground floor, north room, showing jamb of doorway and stonework around the high level window feature. [Rebecca Lane © Historic England]

Figure 21 Interior, east elevation, ground floor, north room, detail of projecting stonework over blocked doorway. [DP219919]

it is tempting to suggest some form of stair. However, the form and the height of the stonework are not entirely consistent with such a feature. Further investigation of this area, particularly where the upper portions are concealed by the later ceiling, may assist its interpretation. A stair in this position would fit with the blocked intermediate window which is visible on the exterior of the elevation. Internally this window position is visible as a brick patching in the area immediately adjacent to the (later) fireplace feature (Figure 22).

Above the southern doorway there is a further section of projecting masonry (Figure 23). This is not the same as that to the north, with a stone cantilevered out from the stone jamb of the archway. Above this cantilevered stone is a further section of stone rubble. It is unclear what this relates to, and it may in fact be a wholly later feature. As with that to the north, it requires further investigation to establish whether it is part of an original feature or not.

The only other original feature which is positively identifiable in the east elevation is the upper window directly over the archway. Internally this has rebated jambs of the same sort as those visible on the cupboard recesses in the west elevation (Figure 24). These do not run the full depth of the present opening, starting some 0.4m above the present base of the window. To the north its return along the upper edge is

Figure 22 Exterior, east elevation, showing window opening cut through gateway arch jamb and the blocked doorway opening and intermediate window opening above. [DP219942]

visible, although it appears to finish close to the middle of the current opening. These features appear to relate to an original window opening, possibly of two lights, of relatively small overall proportions.

Figure 23 Interior, east elevation, ground floor showing area of rubble projecting over south doorway. [Rebecca Lane © Historic England]

Figure 24 Interior, east elevation, first floor, north room, showing rebate around high-level window opening. [DP219930]

While a number of original features can be traced in the east and west elevations of the building the plan form these relate to is difficult to recover. Apart from the principal thoroughfare through the main archway, the positioning of windows and cupboard recesses to the north and south indicates that the building was two storied to either side. To the north it may have continued for some considerable distance beyond its current northern extent providing a large room heated by the chimney stack surviving in the east wall. Access to the first floor clearly must have been provided, and it may have been via a stair immediately south of the chimney stack, although at present the evidence from this area of the building is somewhat ambiguous. The number of external doorways suggests that the two sides of the archway may have been independent units, even at this early date.

Phase Two – Late 16th or early 17th Century: Post-Dissolution Alterations

At some time after the Dissolution of the Carmelite friary in 1538, there appears to have been a major phase of alteration to the gatehouse, in which it was adapted to provide two separate domestic units. This appears to have reused timber-framed material, either from the earlier gatehouse or perhaps from the wider friary site, and as such some of its features, particularly the roof structure, have been previously identified as part of the medieval building (Woodfield 2005). The only timber dated as part of the dendrochronological sampling of the building provided a possible early 16th-century date (Arnold et al. 2020). Close examination makes it clear that all of the structural timber elements show signs of adaptation, and are extremely unlikely to represent in situ medieval material.

Subsequent phases of change, particularly in the 20th century (*see below*), have also made use of reused timber framing, creating a quite consistent overall form; the separate phases of this work can be distinguished, however. The precise date of this conversion is unclear, and the extent of reused material makes it difficult to establish a date with any certainty. Nevertheless, the reuse of early 16th century material suggests that it happened in a post-Dissolution phase, but probably at a stage when material from the site was still readily available, possibly in the late 16th or early 17th century.

The uncertainty over the earlier form of the building makes the extent of alterations difficult to establish. It seems likely that, whatever the original extent of the gatehouse building, at this date the north and south walls of the building were delineated in roughly the same position as those surviving, although the extant north and south walls are later rebuilds. Whether further medieval fabric survived beyond these walls, divided into further units, is unclear. It also seems likely that, if the centre of the building rose higher than its current extent in the medieval period, it was truncated as part of this phase, to allow the present roofing arrangement to be created.

At ground-floor level, as part of this phase, the north and south side walls of the principal passageway were rebuilt. That to the south has been altered again (*see* below), but to the north the wall comprises a base of reused sandstone blocks with some inclusions of brick, with a timber-framed wall above, infilled with brick

Figure 25 Exterior, north elevation of passageway. [DP219943]

Figure 26 Detail of chisel carpenter's mark on north passageway wall. [DP219938]

Figure 27 Interior, ground floor, north room showing inserted fireplace. [DP219918]

nogging (Figure 25). The timber framing is formed of a sill beam with box framing above. Towards the western end the stone base disappears and there is a section of timber acting as a sill beam at a lower level. This may mark the position of a doorway, or alternatively may simply represent a phase of repair and alteration. The horizontal timbers which effectively make up a mid-rail in the timber-framed arrangement are carefully marked with chisel-formed carpenter's marks, running in sequence from the west side of the building, from one to five (Figure 26). These are marked by Roman numerals, with the five represented by five vertical strokes (IIIII) rather than a V. Some corresponding marks are visible on the adjacent vertical timber studs, at II and III. This suggests that the timbers were selected and worked in order to fit together in the wall. Nonetheless it is clear, despite the carpenter's marks, that all of the timber in this wall is reused. There are redundant mortices, lap joints and peg holes in all of the timber, of a form and scale that makes it impossible for them to relate to their use in their current location. The rail marked IIIII, for example, has a mortice with the faint trace of a peg hole now running across the surface of the timber, showing that it has been reworked and cut down from its original form.

The passageway walls support the inserted first floor, which appears to have been lowered from its medieval level, partially cutting the original principal archway. Much of this floor is now concealed, but where it runs through the archway it is formed of a series of joists supported on the passageway walls. It can be presumed that initially further joists ran from the passageway walls to the side walls of the

Figure 28 Interior, ground floor, south room showing inserted fireplace. [DP219912]

Figure 29 Interior, ground floor, north room, detail of south jamb showing small sections of brick and other ceramic building material used during construction. [DP219922]

building, although the later reconstruction of the side walls is likely to have affected this arrangement.

It is likely that the central chimney stacks to each side of the passageway were also inserted as part of this phase (Figures 27 and 28). At ground-floor level these are formed of reused stone, with reused timber lintels. That these are not medieval features is confirmed by the fact that there are small inclusions of tile, brick or other ceramic building material in the mortar joints between the stonework, as well as the lack of any fine finish to the edges of the opening (Figure 29). The stacks effectively subdivided both the ground-floor areas into two rooms, although the timber-framed partitioning around the stack to formalise this arrangement is later. How these subdivided spaces were used is unclear, but presumably the heated room provided domestic accommodation of some kind.

The northern unit appears to have had a more complicated plan, as the original fireplace in the east wall of the building appears to have been retained, although later modifications make it impossible to establish its precise form or if it was in use at this stage. If it was in use it would seem to preclude the need for the large central fireplace to be constructed. It is possible that it was used to heat the smaller, eastern space, but it seems excessive for the relatively small ground-floor area to have two fireplaces. It is possible that it was a redundant feature at this point, but that it was retained as it was structurally integral to the east wall of the building.

There must originally have been staircases rising to access the first floor rooms and these may have been located behind the stacks, although the present stairs are later, and a more basic ladder-type access would perhaps have been sufficient, particularly as it only had to rise to first-floor level.

At first-floor level a timber-framed transverse subdivision was inserted, running centrally through the building, directly over the centre of the principal passageway. This sits on a beam which was supported by the joists running over the main passageway at ground floor level (Figure 30). As with the ground-floor timber framing this subdivision is of box framing and largely formed of reused timber, although it is possible that the main sill beam at this level is of primary timber as it shows no signs of residual features (Figure 31). The timber subdivision appears to have provided a single large room at first-floor level for each unit, notwithstanding the chimney stack which must have risen through the space. The current fireplaces at this level are later insertions, and it is likely that originally the first-floor rooms were unheated. Although the present frames are later, it is probable that the original window openings in the west elevation at first-floor level were enlarged as part of this phase. These appear to have been widened by removing the stonework from the wall top downwards, and rebuilding the walling above the opening. This seems most likely to have happened as part of the significant alterations to the structure as part of this phase, rather than the more minor later alterations, although there is no precise evidence to help date the change.

Figure 30 Interior, first floor, beam forming base of transverse division running through the building. [DP219931]

Figure 31 Interior, first floor, north room, detail of transverse partition running through the building. [DP219902]

Figure 32 Interior, second floor, north room showing detail of central truss. [DP219895]

These first-floor rooms were also open to the roof structure above. The roof structure itself is formed again of reused timber. Originally it comprised three trusses, with end trusses over the north and south walls, and a central truss, which is structurally part of the transverse timber-framed subdivision running through the building at first-floor level. Both the north and south trusses have subsequently been altered, but the central truss represents a better survival (Figure 32). It is of a simple framed form, with a tie beam and slightly raking struts supporting the collar. There are also further smaller struts providing support for the partition and suggesting that the truss was always closed. All of the timbers show signs of reuse, with the struts clearly showing residual notches or lap joints, for example. The tie beam has a large scarf joint towards its western end, a structurally problematic position, which strongly suggests that the timber was not originally cut to span this space. The tie beam is attached to the wall plates which run along the east and west elevations of the building by metal straps, a further sign that the timbers do not form part of a medieval phase, when they would be much more likely to be properly jointed.

The southern truss now comprises a tie beam and collar, both of which sit slightly inwards from the later south wall (Figure 33). The north truss similarly comprises a tie beam and collar (Figure 34). The trusses support a single purlin to both the east and west, resting on the back of the trusses at collar height. Wind braces rise from each truss to the purlins, and there are residual holes for further braces at

Figure 33 Interior, second floor, south room, showing detail of south truss. [DP219887]

Figure 34 Interior, second floor, north room, showing northern truss. [DP219896]

Figure 35 Interior, second floor, detail of purlin on south side, showing redundant peg holes. [DP219891 crop]

intermediate points on the purlins (Figure 35 and *see* Figure 17). Wind braces in these intermediate positions could not have worked with the present roof structure, however, as there is no timber for them to have risen from (unless they ran all the way from the wall plate, which is an extremely unlikely arrangement). Thus it seems probable that the purlins and extant wind braces are reused from an earlier roof. Whether this roof was part of the gatehouse or came from elsewhere is unclear.

Figure 36 Interior, first floor, south room, showing detail of lateral partition running east to west through the building on the right, with later framing in the left-hand wall. [DP219909]

Phase Three – Further Subdivision

There is evidence for several phases of subsequent alteration to the basic layout created in the post-Dissolution phase, although all of these (until the 20th century) appear to have maintained the basic plan of two units equally sharing the space either side of the gate passage. The extent to which these alterations are part of coherent campaigns or more piecemeal changes is difficult to determine. A series of more significant alterations have been phased together here, although it is possible that they took place at separate times. The date of these changes is also unclear, but would be typical of the type of changes seen to buildings in the 17th century.

There is a clear phase of alteration in which the first-floor accommodation provided in Phase Two was altered and updated. This included a lateral subdivision down the centre of the building, creating two rooms at first-floor level (Figure 36). This partition is also of timber-framing and is very similar to the transverse partition of Phase Two. That it is later is proved by the earlier floorboards, which run the full width of the western room and extend underneath the lateral subdivision into the eastern rooms (*see* Figure 30). This partition must have had a doorway in each unit to provide access through the first-floor rooms. That to the northern unit is still extant; that in the southern unit is now gone, but may be represented by the narrower bay in the box framing adjacent to the fireplace.

Figure 37 Interior, first floor, north room, detail of inserted fireplace. [DP219903]

This subdivision corresponds to (and therefore is likely to be the same date or slightly later than) the first-floor fireplaces. These are of similar form with hearth backs formed of bricks placed in a continuous curve, although that in the southern unit is located in a different position, angled in the corner of the west room, whereas that in the northern unit sits straight on (Figures 37 and 38). This may be to do with the chimney arrangement; possibly the southern fireplaces had a combined flue with the chimney in the next-door unit necessitating some compromise. The lateral subdivision also supports the inserted second floor, which sits below tie beam level of the Phase Two trusses. Instead the principal transverse beams for this floor are supported on the lateral subdivision, suggesting that the creation of the attic rooms happened at the same time as the creation of the first-floor partition. The subdivision of the first-floor and attic space would also have required a more substantial stair and it is probable that in this phase the present arrangement of stairs to the rear of the chimney stacks was established. Although later renewed, it is also likely that the dormer windows in the eastern part of the roof space were added at this time, as otherwise there would have been no means of lighting the second-floor rooms.

Figure 38 Interior, first floor, south room, showing inserted fireplace. [DP219903]

Phase Four – Modifications within No. 35

At some stage the northern unit of the gatehouse (No. 36) was modified in order to provide access from this property into the rear range of the adjacent property (No. 35). This is indicative of a typical process of amalgamation and subdivision in street properties, where space from formerly independent units could be subsumed to form larger properties. It is not clear when the northern unit of the gatehouse became associated with the adjacent property. The front range of No. 35 was demolished in the late 20th century and much of the evidence from the rear range of this unit, although it is still extant, has been lost in recent fire damage. The very similar structural development of the north and south units of the gatehouse, however, suggests that this may have happened relatively late in its history. It seems likely that there was still a subdivision between the two units (No. 35 and the northern unit, No. 36) at the initial stage of post-Dissolution alteration (*see* Phase Two). At some stage the rear of No. 36 appears to have been altered allowing access between the smaller, eastern ground-floor room and the rear range of No. 35. This perhaps took place when that range was constructed. The date of this is unclear largely due to the recent fire damage, but records of the range before the fire, including detailing to the beam work, suggest it may have been constructed in the 17th or early 18th century. However, it is not definitively depicted on the mid-18th-century mapping. Possibly at the same time, the chimney stack on the eastern external wall of the gatehouse building appears to have been modified and heavily rebuilt, with only the southern edge of the earlier stack surviving (*see* Figure 10). This appears to have narrowed the original stack, and may have been designed to accommodate the rear range of

Figure 39 Exterior, south wall of passageway showing brick reconstruction. [DP219944]

No. 35, allowing it to continue eastwards unimpeded. As modified the stack appears to have continued to provide a fireplace in the eastern room of the northern unit of the gatehouse, as the chimney appears to have been reconstructed (although later truncated) and smoke blackening is visible in the surviving upper portion, indicating that it was used.

Mapping evidence seems to indicate that by the mid-18th century the gatehouse structure had a series of extensions to its rear, to either side of Whitefriars Lane. This corresponds to the roof scar which is visible on the east elevation, north of the archway. This runs across the modified stack, indicating that these structures were added after the stack was altered. The line of the roof scar appears to indicate that the extension that was constructed was a single-storey structure, with a pitched roof which seems to have effectively been a lean-to on the rear range of No. 35.

Phase Five – Minor Alterations

There is evidence of further minor alterations which are difficult to phase in relation to each other. These are typically related either to the need to address structural problems in the building, or modifications to update the domestic provision.

Figure 40 Interior, second floor, south room, inserted fireplace. [DP219886]

At some stage there has been a significant phase of remedial work around the main passageway. This appears to be due to the problematic way the structural elements were constructed as part of Phase Two – mainly the fact that the main transverse subdivision, and its associated roof truss, runs down through the centre of the building but was supported only on a series of relatively modest timber joists running across the passageway. These were clearly intended to divert the load to the passageway's side walls, but this solution has proved insufficient, and the joists have sagged or failed under the load from the wall. Remedial work of a relatively crude nature has been undertaken with the provision of a further beam underneath the joists, itself supported on a further set of timbers bonded into the side walls (Figure 39). To the south these run into the reconstructed south wall, which is formed entirely of brick. It seems likely therefore that this wall was reconstructed at the same time, perhaps due to structural problems with this wall as well. The crude nature of the timber used makes the date of this work difficult to determine, but the brick is of a relatively late form, and may date to the 19th century.

A further phase of alteration which may date from the 19th century is the widening of the ground-floor windows. The extent of original fabric surviving in the openings is unclear, but it is clear that the present arrangement is of a later date. This may have taken place in the 19th century, if not before, in order to accommodate domestic or commercial activity in the ground-floor west rooms.

Figure 41 Interior, first floor, 20th century partitioning. [DP219898]

Internally alterations include modification of fireplace openings, particularly in the southern unit. The ground-floor fireplace has been narrowed by the insertion of brickwork, to create a more modest-sized grate, in keeping with a 19th-century date. In the attic room of the southern unit a small fireplace and chimney were inserted against the earlier flue (Figure 40). This has an 18th-century grate, but the opening around this appears relatively crude, and the brickwork of a relatively late date, so it seems likely that the grate is not in its original location and may have been brought in. This again may have been part of a 19th-century alteration to the building.

Phase Six – 20th-Century Amalgamation

The final phase of significant alteration relates to the creation of a single property in the gatehouse, and further updating to provide required utilities. This is known to have taken place after the gatehouse was taken on by Ron Morgan in the 1960s (Singlehurst 2000). This work was obviously intended to have a minimal impact on earlier fabric of the building. Externally there appears to have been some replacement of stonework, apparently on a like-for-like basis. Areas around the northern doorway on the west elevation and the southern first-floor window appear to have been renewed. To the rear there are similar areas of patching, particularly relating to the south-east corner of the building, the first-floor southern window and the blocked window opening adjacent to the chimney stack.

The principal internal modifications appear to have been to the first-floor level, where doorways were inserted in the main transverse partition between both the

eastern and western rooms. The eastern area was further subdivided to create a kitchen area and bathroom area (Figure 41). These subdivisions are also timber-framed, presumably in order to blend with the earlier timber work. Some further subdivisions, around the base of the northern stair, on the first-floor adjacent to the southern chimney stack and in both attic rooms under the eaves, also appear to relate to this phase, providing storage space and/or display areas for the toy museum.

As part of this phase the subdivision between the rear range of the unit to the north (No. 35) and the northern unit of the gatehouse appears to have been consolidated with areas of walling inserted between the two. Adjacent to this, the reconstructed chimney stack appears to have been altered to provide shelving by removing the front of the stack to create a recess at an intermediate height between the ground and first floors, accessed from the stairs.

DISCUSSION

As has been demonstrated in the description above, the exact form of the original gatehouse is uncertain. The fabric analysis suggests, however, that the east and west walls are largely survivals of the original phase, and that as well as the principal passageway the gatehouse provided a number of further spaces. To the north the building appears to have extended further than the current northern extent and this space was heated by a large fireplace in the east wall. First-floor accommodation appears similarly to have been provided, to both the north and south of the passageway, and this seems to have had provision for storage, with recessed cupboards with hinges. This clearly indicates that the building provided more than just a through passage.

Whilst monastic gatehouses must have been a relatively common feature in larger medieval towns and cities, their survival is much rarer. The Dissolution and subsequent sale of urban monastic sites saw their widespread destruction, and as such there is little comparative data to assist in analysing the individual features of the Coventry Whitefriars Gate. Comparison with surviving monastic gatehouses in rural contexts and with city gates in general, however, suggests some possibilities for the use of the spaces within the gatehouse. In a monastic context gateways were often places where almonries were sited, for the giving of alms, or guest ranges to house visitors (Rowell 2000). Administrative functions too were often carried out in gatehouses, being points that were easy for visitors to access. Sometimes monastic officials associated with these functions were housed in ranges attached to the gatehouse as well. Some combination of these functions might be anticipated in Whitefriars Gate.

Alterations to the gatehouse have traditionally been ascribed to a relatively late phase; Singlehurst (2000, 1) suggests that its conversion into dwellings took place after its sale by the Hales in the late 18th century. It is clear from close analysis however that much of the timberwork traditionally thought to be medieval is in fact reused, and represents a significant phase of reconfiguration in the building. The availability of timberwork for reuse and the use of timber rather than brick strongly suggests that this phase took place prior to the 18th century, possibly in the late 16th or 17th

centuries. Any more precise dating is difficult as there is very little stylistic evidence to help with its date. The fact that, as redesigned, the upper storey was open to the roof, however, might be seen to imply a date earlier rather than later in this period, as by the 17th century the ceiling over of chambers and the use of attic space was typical. A few timbers have been tentatively identified as being primary to this phase (the wall plates of the side walls in the passageway, and the plate at the base of the transverse subdivision), and dendrochronological sampling might be able to pinpoint a date, although this may provide too few samples for a proper date range to emerge or they may also be reused.

As altered, the building appears to have been designed to provide some form of domestic accommodation, particularly in the provision of fireplaces on the ground floor. The almost symmetrical arrangement of features on the ground floor, particularly in the positioning of the fireplaces, could suggest that it was intended to provide accommodation for two residents even at this early stage. Nevertheless the precise use of these two units remains uncertain. Subsequent alterations saw the upgrading of the accommodation at first-floor level with ceilings, attic rooms and additional fireplaces. These changes could well relate to the alteration of the building in the late 18th or early 19th century.

CONCLUSION

Whitefriars Gate represents an important and rare survival of a medieval gatehouse structure associated with an urban friary. Comparative research has identified very few surviving examples of such buildings, and those that do survive are typically extremely fragmentary. It is clear that there has been little detailed study of this building type, particularly in the context of urban friaries, and it is likely that further comparative research would yield more evidence to assist in the interpretation of the Coventry example.

While the current structure has yielded some important interpretive points, and allowed some interpretation in this report, there is much that is still uncertain about its original form and subsequent use. The planned work on the building will undoubtedly provide further opportunity to examine the fabric, particularly that of the east and west walls. Close observation during the conservation work will be crucial, and may serve to alter and improve the known story of the site.

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