

Hull's Monasteries (and Friaries).

There is a key difference between a Monastery and a Friary and that is in the way Monks and Friars practised their beliefs. Friars made less of the building itself and existed by living within local communities, practicing their beliefs with the people. True monks lived in closed orders in Monasteries, and devoted themselves to a relationship with God in this way. Perhaps I can illustrate this by referring to that well-known friar from Nottingham, Friar Tuck. Fictional or not he clearly did not meet Robin Hood in a monastery, but out in the forest with the people!

Friars feature in Hull's past, and a couple of Street names give clues: Whitefriargate, one of the main shopping streets, was the home of the 'White Friars, and Blackfriargate, the name of a different order of Friars. The difference was largely to do with the Habit (dress) and its main colour.

A further Augustinian Friary was established in a church now buried under the car park in Lowgate.

The Charterhouse (Hull Charterhouse) was a Carthusian monastery and Alms House: an early form of hospital; Maison Dieu (God's House). It was this hospital factor that largely saved it from the ravages of the dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. It lies just outside the town walls and to the North of the route area in this guide. It was rebuilt in 1645 and again in 1780; the building is still in use today.

As explained, friars are different from monks in that they are called to live their vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience in service to society, rather than being cloistered in monasteries. Friars work among lay people was supported by donations, or in another curious way for the Augustinian Friary in Lowgate, as we will see later.

Carmelite Friars (known as White Friars because of the colour of their habits) arrived in Hull around 1293. They live on, of course, in the street name Whitefriargate. From 1303 there were Augustinian friars (known as Grey Friars) in Hull. The street name Blackfriargate which runs parallel to the A63 near the large road bridge, indicates there were Dominican friars (known as Black Friars because of their black robes) in Hull.

Having said that friars lived largely in the community, an Augustinian Friary was built as a Church on the corner of Liberty Lane and Lowgate. It extended, with its graveyard as far as the area beyond that of the Hull Magistrates Court, (which was built in 2001). The church existed until around 1632.

This Church and its friars survived on charitable giving, but also made money by letting off coffin space on the wide window ledges of the Church. Applying commercial principles; the nearer to the alter, the nearer to God and the greater the charge.

Incidentally an excavation of the graveyard and work on the remains, revealed a high incidence of the sexually transmitted disease syphilis; 200 years before it was said to have been imported by Christopher Columbus from the Americas.

In the well preserved graves were flagellation whips used by the monks as part of their religious ritual. The skeletons taken from the graves also revealed a lot of arthritic disease, as befitted the swampy conditions of this area. The bones were re-interred in St Charles Catholic Church near to Hull New Theatre just to the North of the area of the tour.

Many of the coffins were made of oak, found by carbon dating to have come from Latvia in 1420.

In the area around the old High Street and Market Place, very little remains to be seen of the bustling area once frequented in some numbers by the friars and their early charitable work in mediaeval England. However, a symbol of the Augustinian Order is etched into the glass of the doorway of the Magistrates Court.