

On Saturday 17th May 2014, the Friars from Blessed Agnellus of Pisa Formation House in Oxford appeared on the front page of the Oxford Mail newspaper.

The interview came about after plans were unveiled that the friars will be moving from their current home in Holton, near Wheatley, to a new home in Cowley just a short distance from the city centre. 12 friars will be making the move into the former All Saints Convent on St. Mary's Road in Cowley, formerly the home of the Anglican Sisters of the All Saints Sisters of the Poor. The Sisters will be relocating to a smaller residence nearby, and have been extremely positive about the friars' arrival in Cowley

The Article Reads:

By Matt Oliver - The Oxford Mail

THEY fled the city almost 500 years ago during the English Reformation. But this summer, after centuries away, the Greyfriars will finally return to Oxford. The Conventual Catholic friars are to settle in All Saints Convent, Cowley, in the next two months, once it is vacated by the All Saints Sisters of the Poor, who are moving to a smaller building.

Greyfriar formator Friar Daniel Geary, 53, said: "It is going to be quite a wonderful and historic moment. "There will be 12 of us in the house of formation, with many being involved in training and going to classes. "But part of that process is also to become involved with the area. Cowley is a very rich and diverse place and we look forward to joining the community."

Known as the Greyfriars for their grey robes, two members of the Franciscan Conventuals first arrived in Oxford in 1224, having been sent to England by St Francis of Assisi, a medieval saint famed for creating the Nativity scene.

The monks lived in Greyfriars Hall, in Iffley Road, and provided aid to city's growing population, helping the poor and founding academic institutions. But in 1538 their convent, along with others around the country, fell foul of King Henry VIII during the English Reformation.

That saw the King reject the authority of the Pope and make himself head of the Church, so he could grant himself a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. What followed was a purge of catholic monks loyal to the Vatican and the order was forced to flee the country.

Years later, in 1906, the Greyfriars returned to England. Then in 1928 another branch of Franciscans, the Capuchin Franciscans, took over the care of Greyfriars Hall.

But last September the Greyfriars took a house in Holton, near Wheatley, and since then they have been hoping to move back to the city.

Paul Kennedy, 28, is currently training to be a friar. He said an increase in young recruits like himself prompted the monks to come back to Oxford.

He said: "We thought it was a good reason to come back, it's really quite exciting for all of us. "It has been a struggle to find somewhere that has enough bedrooms for all of us. "But we heard the All Saints sisters had left their convent because it was too big and they were more than happy to let us move in."

The new convent is also next door to Helen & Douglas House, established by the sisters, and the St John's residential care home, which Mr Kennedy says the Greyfriars will offer their services to.

He added: "We have already had much support from local groups and many of us study at Blackfriar's Hall [in St Giles']. "The reason we wanted to be back in a city is so we can work closely with the homeless, the poor and local schools.

"We hope if people know we are here they will come to us when they need us most."

More information about the Greyfriars

TIMELINE

- September 1224: Nine Franciscans arrive ashore at Dover, led by Blessed Agnellus of Pisa, chosen by St Francis of Assisi.
- November 1224: After leaving five friars in Canterbury, two friars move to London, and the last two settle in a house in Oxford. They teach at colleges in Oxford, many of which were founded by churches.
- 1517: Pope Leo X divides Franciscans into conventuals, who live in cities, and observants, who live outside them.
- 1538: Greyfriars across the country are suppressed during the English Reformation and forced to flee the country.
- 1910: The Greyfriars are re-established in England.
- September 2013: The Greyfriars move into a house near Wheatley.
- June/July 2014: The target time for the Greyfriars to move back to Oxford, at All Saints Convent.