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IN SEARCH OF SABINA

A Study in Cambridge topography¹

CATHERINE P. HALL

'ONCE upon a time there was a certain widow dwelling in the parish of St Peter named Sabina Hasselyf, who . . . gave a portion of her garden to Sabina, daughter of Robert of Fulsham', and this garden had 'free entry and egress through a gate into a croft called Swynescroft'.

This is not, as might appear, the beginning of a medieval romance, but the substance of a memorandum written by John Botwright, master of Corpus Christi College from 1443 to 1474, with the much more prosaic purpose of asserting the College right to what he believed to be College property. The memorandum comes from a bundle of miscellaneous papers in the College archives, which were gathered together and indexed by the eighteenth-century College master and historian Robert Masters. This paper, no. 11, he described as 'A Draught of an Old Chantry', taking his title from the sketch accompanying the memorandum. He does not seem to have recognized the similarity between this paper and the other sketches and memoranda in the bound notebooks known as Botwright's book, also in the College archives.

[*L.H. column*]

Memorandum quod quandam erat quedam vidua in parochia/sancti petri nomine sabina hasselyf que per quandam cartam inde/confectam dedit Sabine filie Roberti de fulsham unam porcionem/ gardini sui continentem in longitudine xxvj pedes/et in latitudine xv pedes cum libero introitu et exitu/per unam portam de dicta porcione illius placee versus oriens/ad unamcroftam vocatam communiter Swynescroft habendam et tenendam/pro servicia inde debita et de jure consueta que ad tantam/porcionem terre pertinent. et ista sabina prius recitata/dedit placeam suam et tenementum predictum in Canteriam/in parochia sancti petri ut communiter dicitur. [altera autem sabina sursum reddit]. preter illam porcionem gardini prius per cartam recitatam/quod quidem tenementum in dictam canteriam collatam continet/in latitudinem ad caput occidentale xliij pedes de/standardo regio.

(Below is a sketch of a building marked 'Domus Cantarie s(ancti) p(etri)' with the frontage at the foot of the sheet. 'Istud tenementum continet ad caput occidentale in latitudine de standardo regio quadraginta quattuor pedes super regiam viam.')

See Figs. 1 and 2.

[*R.H. column*]

(At top of sheet:)

Campus Swynescroft

Gardinum fratrum de cymperhingham sive alborum canonicum.

Advertisendum quoque est quod Sabina unica/filia Roberti de fulsham sua tenementum/et gardinum contulit gilde corporis/cristi et beate marie cantebregie cum/dicta porcione gardini a dicta/sabina

¹ Suggested by C.C.C. Miscellaneous Documents No. 11.

haselyf vidua perquisita/et solvendo pro rata porcione/dicti gardini pertinente et non amplius/ut patet per quandam cartam expresse dicte nostre/sabine sub sigillo alterius sabine munitam et specificantem in hec verba viz. Faciendo/inde annuatim predictis capitalibus dominis feodi/servicia inde debita et de jure consueta que ad tantam terram pertinent cuius longitudo/ut patet in eadem carta se extendit ad xxvj pedes/tantum latitudo vero ad quindecim pedes/de quibus collegium modo defraudatur de octo/pedibus in longitudine in tantum quod porta/gardini cantarie stat modo per duos pedes/nimis prope super terram collegii defraudatur etiam/in latitudine eiusdem porcionis ad tres pedes de standardo regio.

(In a different ink)

Et si queratur quare non est solutus dictus redditus iis/sicut nuper alias per collegium corporis christi factus collegio de/Merton Respondeatur quia non erat umquam solutus ante tempus/cuiusdam Agnetis Willingham lotricis flavicolorum¹/qui sepe a quodam Ricardo Goodrich² quondam/maiore Cant' firmario collegii de Merton predicti/quem dictum redditum post de illa agneta exegit./licet nec ab illa nec ab aliis prius umquam habuit.

(Below this, as on the other side, is a sketch of a building, labelled 'Domus corporis christi', and its frontage is again recorded at the foot of the sheet 'Istud tenementum continet in latitudine xxvj pedes et quartum verge'.)

The document is, in fact, conceived in the form of a sketch-map, for the double line separating the two columns of writing represents a little lane leading from the high road (the lower margin of the paper) to the 'Campus Swynescroft', mentioned in the text, at the top of the sheet. Here also is depicted the door in the wall by which Sabina had free entry and egress, and to the right of it 'the garden of the Brothers of Sempringham or White Canons'. The compass directions and other details of the sketch-map make it fairly simple to discover exactly where the properties lay. The parish of St Peter is that 'extra portam de Trumpyton' (subsequently St Mary-the-Less) and the 'regia via', represented by the lower margin of the paper, is Trumpington Street. The houses lay on the east side of the street with their gardens running back to Swynescroft – named from the former owner, Swyn or Sweyn, mentioned in early town documents, and not from usage, later also called St Thomas' Leys. The White Canons, whose main property lay roughly where Addenbrooke's Hospital now stands, seem to have possessed fairly extensive gardens in the crofts behind the houses fronting Trumpington Street.

The area shown in the sketch now lies under part of Pembroke College. The College, in fact, owned the whole site by c. 1592, when Hamond's town map was published, but as the Chantry property had only come into the market thirty years previously, the College buildings had not yet extended sufficiently far to the south to obliterate the ancient outlines. More fortunately still, the archives preserved in Pembroke College Box contain charters which give the earlier history of the houses. By the courtesy of the College it has been possible for me to search for the names of former owners and test the claim of Corpus Christi College to the house marked in the sketch.

^{1,2} See p. 73. I must thank Professor C. R. Cheney for help with this section.

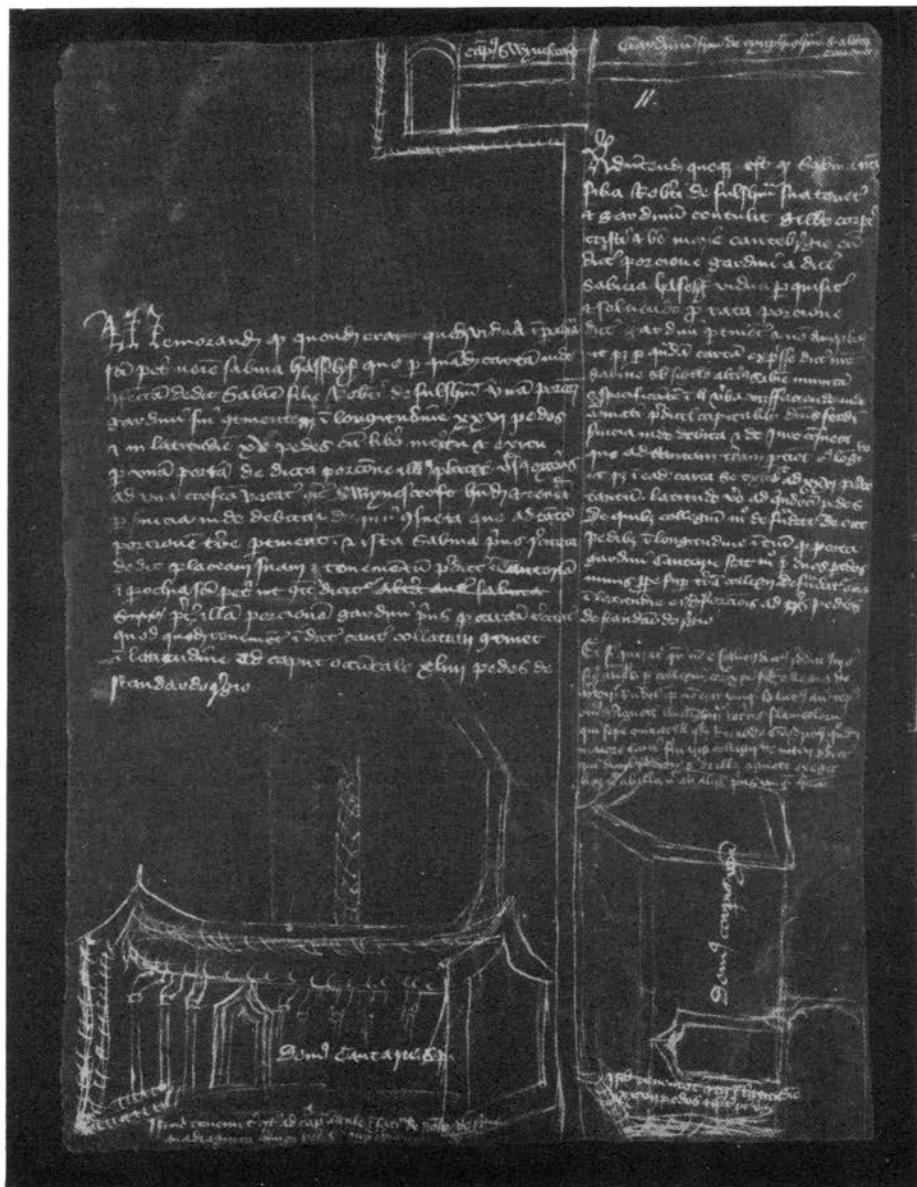
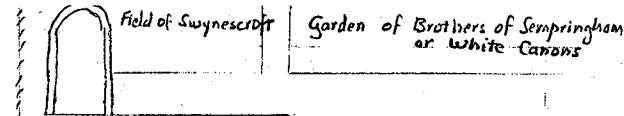


Fig. II

IN SEARCH OF SABINA

63



Portion of garden sold
by Sabina Hasselyf to
Sabina de Fulsham.

26 ft

This portion of garden
subsequently reduced by
strip 8ft x 2-3ft to give
access from the Chantry
garden.

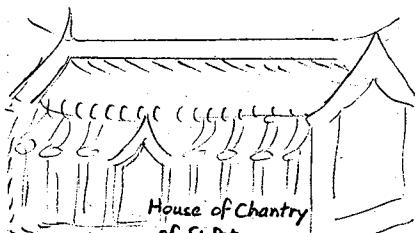
(The Pykerell or Chantry House)

(The Winhouse House)

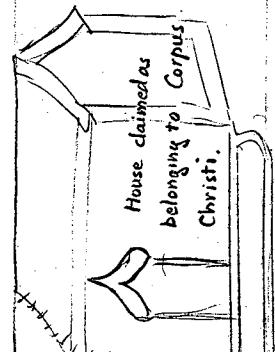
(Tenement and garden
belonging to family of
de Holm.)

Memorandum that
Sabina Hasselyf gave
her place & tenement to
the Chantry of ST Peter,
except the portion of the
garden above.

Lane leading to Swynescroft



This tenement is 44 ft in width on S. side
on the high road.



Width of tenement
27 ft. omitting verge.

HIGH ROAD (Trumpington Street)

(Tenement belonging to St John's Hospital.)

The documents in the Pembroke College Box are arranged according to the ancient properties underlying the present College site, beginning with the Foundress' bequests in the south-west corner and continuing south and east roughly in chronological order of acquisition. Unfortunately no documents appear to have been preserved for the Chantry House with which this paper is concerned. Bundle I, marked 'Chantry House', as is clear from neighbours and abutments given in the document, refers to the second house belonging to the Chantry, further down the road, to the south of the tenement of St John's (bundle H). The College histories assume that both Chantry houses came into the possession of the College at the same time, namely, at the first sale of dissolved Chantry property in 1549.

The house marked 'Domus Corporis Christi' in the sketch-plan can be readily identified as messuage G of the Pembroke College Box by its position between the little lane leading from the high road to Swynescroft on the north and the above-mentioned St John's tenement on the south. These boundaries are given in almost all the earlier documents in the bundle and all nineteen of them are skewered and bound with a sheepskin thong in the ancient manner. They may well have been so bound when the property was acquired by Pembroke College in the mid-fifteenth century, and though they are not bound up in chronological order, they give a sequence of ownership and occupancy for the preceding two centuries.

The earliest document (Ga), undated but from the first half of the thirteenth century, relates how Absolom, son of Robert Winhose, for the benefit of his soul and that of his wife Lucy and of his parents, granted to the church of St Thomas the martyr of Lesnes and the canons thereof all his house 'in villa de Grantebrig extra portam de Trumpeton iuxta venellam que dicit ad Swenescroft et extendit se Est West'. In the second (Gb) the Abbot and convent of Lesnes re-grant to Albric fitz Winhose 'all that messuage formerly of Robert his parent' subject to an annual rent-charge of 4/6d. per annum. The recurrence of this rent-charge in later documents is further evidence that the contents of bundle G refer to the same property. The neighbours are given as William fitz Godlamb and Peter, priest of Nuneham. The Godlamb family are associated well into the fourteenth century with the first strip in the open fields lying immediately behind the crofts and houses.

An approximate dating can be made for this document from its witnessing by Robert Seman. He was a contemporary of Hervey fitz Eustace, first recorded mayor of Cambridge, who died c. 1240.¹ The next document (G1) is again only datable from its mayor, Roger Wikes, who held office in 1256, in 1260 and again in 1270. In it the messuage, 'formerly of Robert Winnehouse' is granted by John, son of Thomas Arnald junior de Kantebrig, to John de Redgrave for homage, service, 8 marks and a pair of shoes; the rent is one rose at St John Baptist and the rent-charge of 4s. 6d.

¹ V.C.H. III, 38.

to the aforesaid Abbot. Possibly in the following year, when John Martyn was mayor (1270–1), Richard de Seyton and Matilda his wife made a grant of the same house to John de Redgrave and his wife Agnes. The wording suggests that the first of these transactions was the purchase of the house and the second gave him and his wife vacant possession from outgoing tenants. One of the leading witnesses to this document is John de Aylesham, a wealthy townsman, whose importance will appear later (G2).

From this point onwards the sequence of both ownership and occupation of the house in question is unbroken. The Pembroke deeds are clear and complete.¹ It passes from the Redgraves to Robert, son of John Roger de Cumberton, at Epiphany 1293 and stays with that family until 1385/6. It then passes via John Mildenhale to William Ockham, clerk, with an adjacent croft acquired by the Cumbertons. William Ockham does some complicated leasing to three other clerks, all also named William, in 1394/5. In 1400 he conveys his messuage, acre and croft to Thomas Lavenham, clerk, and two others, Herbert and Skelton. These last in the same year purchase another adjacent acre of arable and convey all the land to Pembroke College, where it becomes 'The Orchard'. The messuage itself is conveyed by Thomas Lavenham in 1419 to five named persons, two of whom convey it to Ellen Bolton in 1422. From Ellen Bolton, later Ellen Knapton, it takes the name it is known by in the Pembroke College histories; it is conveyed to the College in 1430. But nowhere in the whole sequence of deeds is there anyone named Sabina or any hint of ownership by the Guild or College of Corpus Christi.

The widow of the parish of St Peter, Sabina Hasselyf, and her neighbour, Sabina de Fulsham, must therefore be sought elsewhere. Very fortunately the first Sabina was a woman of sufficient importance to leave a good deal of record evidence behind her. In particular she appears in the Hundred Rolls of 1279, and H. P. Stokes, in his study of property-holding based primarily on that great survey, 'Outside the Trumpington Gates',² attempted a short biography.

This widow, who was a great heiress, was the daughter of a Cambridge citizen named Martin Brithnoth, upon whose death, and that of her uncle Hervey, she succeeded to the family possessions and proceeded to purchase other houses and lands. Her first husband was Peter de Wilburham, one of the borough bailiffs, who apparently died after a short married life. Mistress Sabina after a while found another partner in John de Aylesham, a Cambridge townsman. After the death of this citizen the lady soon appears as Sabina 'Asselof' and therefore it may be presumed that she or her possessions had again proved attractive, although it should be noted that she still sometimes styled herself 'formerly the wife of John de Aylesham'. In the parish of St Peter-without-the-gates . . . she possessed nine houses.

¹ Pembroke College Box, bundle G.

² H. P. Stokes, 'Outside the Trumpington Gates before Peterhouse was Founded', *Camb. Ant. Soc. Octavo Publ.* No. XLIV (1908), pp. 18–19.

Following up Stokes' sources we find that in the Hundred Rolls Sabina and her husband appear as 'Joh' de Eilesham et Sabina uxor sua'. With the date of this survey (1279) as the starting-point it is possible to get some approximate dating into Sabina's biography, though neither the date of her marriage to Aylesham nor that of his death can be exactly discovered. She was married to her previous husband, Peter de Wilburham, at the time of their purchase of a house from Thomas de Ho, the grant of which is quoted by Stokes and dated All Saints, 49 Henry III (1265).¹ The same Peter de Wilburham appears as a witness in two Corpus deeds of the time of Richard fitz Laurence, mayor, who held this office in 1263 and again in 1269/70.²

The date of her second widowhood cannot certainly be fixed before 1299, the date of the earliest document quoted by Stokes in which Sabina is explicitly described as 'quondam uxor Johanni de Aylesham'. He may well have been dead in 1298, in which year the first surviving memoranda of the Gild of St Mary begin.³ The names of those who hold chattels of the Gild in the opening list include so many of the leading townsmen who were Aylesham's neighbours and fellow-officers that it seems unlikely that he would have been passed over had he been alive. He died too soon, it would seem, to appear either as an officer or as a benefactor of the Gild or on the Bede Roll, which begins a little later.

The date of Sabina's last marriage can only be surmised from the wording of two charters in the Corpus Munitments.⁴ The first, which dates from the summer of 1299, runs, 'Sabina uxor quondam Johanis de Aylesham – in mea libera viduitate'. The second, two years later, begins 'Sabina Hasselof quondam relicta Johanis Haylesham de Cantebrig' – in mea pura viduitate et libera potestate'. Both are sealed with the same seal, a device of a bird surrounded by the legend S·SABINE·UXO(RIS)·JOHANIS.

Simon Asselof or Hasselyf, to whom Stokes assigns the role of Sabina's third husband, is mentioned in the documents with which we have been dealing only as a former neighbour in the charter conveying the de Ho house to Sabina and her first husband. From his other researches Stokes believes him to have been a clerk. Perhaps, like the Wyf of Bath, Sabina found that she could afford to marry her last husband for love. Be that as it may, the union appears to have been of brief duration and to have affected neither Sabina's fortune nor her ability to dispose of it. It is as the widow of de Aylesham that she is important as a property-owner and a benefactress.

Aylesham was one of a fairly small group of leading town families from whom the civic officers were chosen at this period. Unlike his contemporaries, the Martyns,

¹ Stokes, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

² See below, p. 68.

³ C.C.C. Box xxxi, no. 2. Membrane. Transcribed and printed by Mary Bateson, *Cambridge Gild Records* (1903), pp. 1–3.

⁴ C.C.C. Box xv, nos. 12 and 15.

the Tuylets and the Goggings, for instance, he left no heir of the same name. A study of his possessions leaves the impression that his rise in position and wealth was fairly rapid and was due at least in part to his marriage to Sabina (née Brithnoth), but that his possessions were equally quickly disposed of by the time of his wife's death. Of the nine houses mentioned in the Hundred Rolls belonging to them in St Peter's parish, four are owned by the husband and wife jointly, five by Aylesham alone. All nine, which lay in a fairly compact group on either side of the Trumpington Road, are relatively recent purchases. None are ancestral possessions, though of course such possessions may have been sold in order to provide capital.

It would seem that the couple were following the fashion of the new rich of every age, moving out of town to an estate they were building in the expanding suburbs. In this the Le Rus and St Edmund families had preceded them, a little further down the Trumpington Road. The same process can be observed about this time among other 'top families' of the town, the Blangernons on Castle Hill and the Martyns at Newnham, for example, to name but two whose activities can be traced from the Corpus archives.

Having acquired a good deal in the way of earthly possessions, and having no heir to inherit the Aylesham estate, Sabina in her widowhood began, according to the outlook of her age, to lay up for herself treasure in heaven. She granted most of her property on the west side of Trumpington Street to the new foundation of Peterhouse, of which the most important, sold in 1299, was the house she and her earlier husband had bought from Sir Thomas de Ho in 1266. (I have not gone into the conditions of these grants to discover whether the transaction should be regarded as an ordinary sale or a sale on such liberal terms as to amount to a benefaction, though I suspect that the latter is likely.)

Outstanding among her pious endowments is that of a recently created charity in her own parish church of St Peter. To the chantry of the Blessed Virgin in that church she gave two of her houses on the east side of Trumpington Street. The first is the Chantry House shown in the Corpus sketch-map, which Aylesham had bought from John Pickerel,¹ the second is the house already mentioned in connection with the Pembroke College deeds (bundle I). No record of her having been the donor is preserved, beyond the statement in the Corpus memorandum, but the fact that both the houses belonging to the chantry were formerly Aylesham's does suggest that in this statement the memorandum is correct. Sabina's double endowment must greatly have increased the wealth and enhanced the importance of the chantry until, perhaps, it eclipsed those of the original church of St Peter, thus preparing for the change of dedication when that church was rebuilt in 1350–2.²

¹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 371–2.

² The newly built church was rededicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and *not*, as Stokes says, to 'St. Mary-the-Less', whoever she may be.

In this very liberal endowment of a chantry we may perhaps see another manifestation of the 'new rich'. The Le Rus family and the St Edmunds family each boasted a private chapel on their estate. The Ayleshams could not quite achieve this status symbol – and indeed the possession of a private chapel or at least a licence to have masses said in one's own house evidently was something of a status symbol, to judge from the number of applications put in by wealthy persons, often ladies, recorded in the earlier registers of the Bishops of Ely – so the next best thing would be a chantry supporting a permanent priest bound to pray for Sabina and her deceased partners.¹

On the other hand, it is also possible that Sabina may have had a personal reason for wishing to make a pious benefaction linked to St Peter's church. Some time before the end of the reign of Henry III a lady named Matilda, daughter of Hervey son of Martin, lived in St Peter's as a recluse and was supported by the income from an acre in Middelfeld (West Field). The actual wording of the documents which refer to this acre is: 'quam scilicet Hervieus filius Martini dedit Matilde filie sue quondam recluse ecclesie sancti Petri extra portam de Trumpton' and 'quam Matilda reclusa ecclesie sancti petri quondam tenuit usque ad terminum vite sue'.² Both these documents are witnessed by Peter de Wilburham, Sabina's first husband, and one is also witnessed by a Humphrey Brithnoth. When it is recalled that Sabina was the heiress of both Martin and Hervey Brithnoth, it is possible that Matilda was of the same family, perhaps her first cousin.

To turn from biography and conjecture to the original problem of the house claimed as the 'Domus Corporis Christi' of the fifteenth-century memorandum, the identification of John de Aylesham with Sabina's husband settles finally any remaining doubts there might be about whether it could have been the subject of transactions between the widowed Sabina and her namesake. The only gap in our knowledge of the ownership and occupation of this, the Winhose house, is in the period immediately prior to its purchase by John de Redgrave, and to the deed of that purchase John de Aylesham himself, alive and indeed a next-door neighbour, is a witness.

Did the Corpus claimant then fabricate the whole of the contents of his memorandum? Such things are by no means unknown, but in this case the existence of documentary evidence, unseen by Stokes but quoted by him from the Cole transcripts, would seem to indicate that the transactions did in fact take place, but perhaps in connection with another of John and Sabina's numerous houses, lying in a similar position between Trumpington Street and Swynescroft. The search must therefore be shifted to those houses and to their subsequent ownership, to see if any link can be found with the Gild or College of Corpus Christi half a century later.

¹ The tenacity of the idea of this type of spiritual insurance may be seen in Franz Werfel's novel *Embezzled Heaven*.

² C.C.C. Box VII, nos. 11a and b.

There were, in fact, several properties on the east side of Trumpington Street which later came into the possession of Corpus Christi College. Their deeds are in the large mixed box of early documents relating to St Peter's parish (C.C.C. Box xv). Search in this box is made none too easy by the fact that all the earlier Corpus documents have been separated from their original bundles and filed in chronological order in their parish box, regardless of provenance. Any documents discovered after the process of cataloguing had begun are liable to have been dropped in anywhere, especially if they are indistinct or lack a date. But in one respect the present searcher is in a better position than Stokes, who only had the Cole transcripts, and so could not make use of the clues provided by similarities in the hand and numbering of endorsements, or physical marks, such as matching discolorations or defects, which show that documents now separated have anciently lain together. In this latest search a very fine clue was provided by the activities of some long-deceased rat, which had gnawed enough to make the detection of related documents easy but not enough to destroy all vital words. Thanks to this rat and to topographical data supplied by documents of adjoining properties, one house can be found which has all the necessary qualifications.

This is the house which was next to the Chantry House, but on the other side from the Winhose house (i.e. the north side). This position makes sense of the transaction whereby Sabina II gained access to Swynescroft through the gate in the wall by purchasing a portion of the end of Sabina I's garden. Both the Chantry House and the Winhose house, as shown on the sketch-map, already had this access through the little lane between the two houses. The house on the other side of the Chantry could obtain it most directly by a way made through the back garden of the Chantry House. (The frontage of 44 feet to the Chantry House compared with the 26 feet, the width of the portion sold, is something of a difficulty but not an insuperable one. The door in the wall is shown to be some way, perhaps as much as 12 or 14 feet, round a corner to the left at the top of the lane. Slight tapering of the garden plots could reduce the necessary minimum width to 26 feet.) Sabina de Fulsham's house cannot have had a very wide frontage and was probably built end-on to the street like the Winhose house. The next property to the north, a house belonging to the de Holm family,¹ takes up most of the remaining ground between the Chantry House and the south boundary of the University Hostel, which became part of the foundation buildings of Pembroke College. In fact the historians of the Pembroke site have overlooked its existence altogether. But the house undoubtedly did exist, and a series of charters in the St Peter's Box in Corpus gives the sequence of its ownership from the widow Sabina Hasselyf to its purchase by trustees of Corpus Christi College in 1361.

Here are the two charters by which Sabina Fulsham obtained her house and then

¹ Pembroke College Box D.

the addition to her garden from Sabina Hasselof, widow of John de Aylesham. The conveyance of the house is dated 27 Ed. (1299), that of the garden Epiphany 29 Ed. (1301).¹ The messuage is described as lying between that formerly of Hugh de Holm and that formerly of Henry Pykerel and abutting on the high road and on the land of Master Thomas de Northfleet. The mention of Henry Pykerel identifies the 'Chantry' house as one of the two mentioned in the Hundred Rolls as having been purchased from that family by the de Ayleshams, on which there is said to be a small rent-charge of 2s., of unknown origin, to the Prioress of St Radegund. The charter transferring the portion of garden has all the details of position, measurements and access as contained in the Corpus memorandum, for which it no doubt served as a basis.

The wording 'cum libero introitu et exitu per unam portam de dicta placea in croftum meum quod vocatur Swenyscroft' does suggest, however, that there must have been a third transaction between the Sabinas conveying this croft, which is shortly afterwards found in Sabina de Fulsham's possession.

In the following reign Sabina, daughter of Robert de Fulsham, conveys her messuage, together with the adjacent croft of half an acre, to William de Burgo and Avicia his wife by two charters of 13 Edward II.² The neighbours on the north, as before, are the de Holms and the frontage is on the high road. The neighbours on the south are given as the de Cumbertons. This wealthy family were the owners of the Winhouse house and for some time seem to have taken up a lease on the adjacent Chantry House. Robert de Cumberton, a baker by trade, was elected Alderman of the Gild of St Mary about this time (1319) and appears frequently in the Gild records.³ William de Burgh, or de Burgo, who became his neighbour, was also a member of the Gild of St Mary. His name appears on their Bede Roll followed by that of his wife Avicia. His trade is given in the printed edition of this roll as 'anconer', of which the suggested interpretation is 'a maker of banners of saints to be carried in procession' (cf. ikon), though the alternative reading 'aucioner' (cf. auctionarius) seems more likely.⁴

Before the deaths of William and Avicia, however, the house was sold to a family named Vavassour. The half-acre croft had been disposed of separately (see below p. 78). Two documents of 13 and 19 Edward III (1339 and 1345)⁵ show the house in the possession of the Vavassour family. By the first it is conveyed from William de Burgh to John Vavassour, burgess and cutler, and his wife Matilda, and by the second from John to his son of the same name. A John Vavassour is recorded in the last extant Bede Roll of the Gild of St Mary among those who have died in the

¹ C.C.C. Box xv, nos. 12 and 15. Both are sealed with the same seal: the device of a bird surrounded by the legend S·SABINE·UXO(RIS)·JOHANIS.

² C.C.C. Box xv, nos. 34 and 35.

³ M. Bateson, *Cambridge Gild Records*, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19(2) and n. I owe the suggested alternative reading to Professor C. R. Cheney.

⁵ C.C.C. Box xv, nos. 50 and 56.

previous year of the Black Death.¹ The house is described as being ‘inter messuagium Thome de Holm ex parte una et tenementum quondam Roberti de Cumberton nunc spectans ad Cantariam beate Marie ecclesie sancti Petri extra Trumpyton (—) Cantebr’’ in the earlier document, and as between the tenement occupied by William de Pyckeworth, chaplain, and the tenement formerly of Thomas de Holm and extending from the high road to Swynescroft in the second. All the documents relating to the house while it was owned by the Vavassour family are chewed in a similar way by the helpful rat.

In the third Vavassour document, which has suffered most from the attentions of the rat,² the widowed Matilda Vavassour conveys to Stephen, son of John Morice, William de Horwod, John (—), Richard (—), Robert (—), William Chapman and John le Barkere, burgesses, her messuage in St Peter’s parish, between the messuage formerly of Dns William de Pykworth, chaplain, and (—), extending from the high road to Swynescroft. It is dated in the feast of St Th(omas), 35 Ed. (III) (i.e. 1361). The two first-named feoffees to this charter are notable citizens of Cambridge³ and leading members of the Gild of Corpus Christi. The date is one at which it was not unusual for groups of such members to hold property, as in trust, which was subsequently conveyed to the recently founded College. The final transfer often takes the form of a sort of ‘umbrella’ document, in which all properties held for the purpose by the named parties are conveyed together after the statutory royal licence for transfer has been obtained. In the case of the Vavassour house the transfer is recorded in a document of 3 March 1364,⁴ in which William de Horwode is the grantor: ‘Willelmus de Horwode burgensis Cantebrig’ de licencia domini regis speciali . . . magistro et scolaribus domus corporis ihu xpi et beate marie cant’. The last item in the list of transferred properties is described thus: ‘aliud cotagium cum pertinenciis quod quondam fuit Johanis Vavassour iacet in parochia sancti petri extra Trumpingtones’. Here, then, is the required link with the College of Corpus Christi.

A document in Pembroke College Box shows that the house immediately to the north of the Vavassour house, the de Holm house, had also come into the hands of the Gild of Corpus Christi about ten years previously. By a charter of 30 Sept. 25 Ed. III (1351)⁵ William de Horwode and Simon Sleford convey or lease to John Wistaw and wife a certain tenement ‘inter tenementum pertinentem ad universitatem [shortly afterwards incorporated into the foundation buildings of Pembroke College] ex una parte et tenementum Cantarie beate Marie ecclesie sancti Petri ex altera parte, et abutat super viam regiam et super venellam que dicit ad Swynescroft . . . quod quidam messuagium habuimus de dono et feoffamento de Holm de Cantebrig’.

¹ M. Bateson, *op. cit.* p. 25.

² C.C.C. Box xv, no. 68.

³ Stephen, son of John Morice, was Mayor of Cambridge in this year (1361–2) and William de Horwode had been Mayor from 1350 to 1352.

⁴ C.C.C. Box xxxi, no. 74.

⁵ Pembroke College Box E, no. 2.

Table I

	Merton	House	Pykerell House	Winhose House
1260				Robert Winhose and his sons Absalom and Albric
1270	Owners Merton College, Oxford		Henry Pykerell to John de Aylsham	John de Redgrave and his wife Alice
1274	Tenant Alan fitz Richer of Cryshale to			1270
1280	Richard of St John			1280
c. 1288	John de Aylesham ----- and ----- Sabina ----- his wife			
1290				1290
1293		Garden to (1) Sabina de Fulsham		1293
1299		(2) Sabina Hasseloff, --- widow of John de Aylsham		
1300				1300
1301	Sabina de Fulsham			
1310				1310
			(Owner Chantry of the B.V.M. in St Peter's)	
1319	William de Burgo and Avicia his wife	(with half-acre adjacent)	Tenant Dr William Pykworth, chaplain	1320
1320				
1329		Avicia to		1330
1330				
1339	John Vavassour and Matilda his wife			1340
1340				
1350				1350
1360				
1361	Matilda Vavassour to the trustees of the Gild of Corpus Christi			1364
1364	To Corpus Christi College			
1370				
1380				1380
1385			Thomas, son of Robert de Comberton, junior, to John Midenhale	1385
1389			Pembroke College	

William de Horwode and Simon de Slefde are, like the grantees of the last Vavassour charter, prominent members of the Gild of Corpus Christi acting as trustees. Horwode was Mayor in this year. The only difficulty about this charter is that the neighbouring property on the south side of the de Holm house is given as a tenement of the Chantry, though the de Fulsham house in fact lay between and did not pass out of the hands of its owners, the Vavassours, until 1361.

The sequence of ownership of the de Fulsham house from its sale by Sabina, widow of John de Aylesham, to its purchase by the members of the Gild of Corpus Christi has now been established (see Table 1). For the history of the house before and after this period we must look outside the records of the Corpus St Peter's box. A clue to where relevant information may be found is given by John Botwright in the footnote to his memorandum, which reads:¹

And if it is asked why the said rent of 3/- is not paid by the College of Corpus Christi to the College of Merton, it shall be answered that it was never paid before the time of a certain Agnes Willingham, washer of yellow cloth,² which was often demanded by a certain Richard Goodrich, formerly Mayor of Cambridge and farmer of Merton College aforesaid,³ which said rent he afterwards exacted from the same Agnes, although he did not previously have it from her or from anybody else.

Following Botwright's clue to the estates of Merton College, Oxford, a brief survey of the calendar of the Cambridge estates of that College⁴ shows that there are indeed two fairly early charters relating to a messuage in the fee of the House of Merton, which from its position is clearly none other than the one which we know as the de Fulsham house. It lies outside the Trumpington Gate between the messuage late of Henry Pykerell and now of John de Eylesham (the Chantry House) and that of Hugh de Helmo, and abuts at one end upon the land of William of Elvesworde (Elsworth). By the first charter Richard de St John receives the property from Alan,⁵ son of Richard Juridicus of Cryshale, and by the second he releases the same to Richard de Worplesdone, the Warden, and the scholars of the House of Merton. The witnesses to the two charters are the same and begin with John Martyn, Mayor, and include John de Eylesham.⁶ Richard de Werpesdon was Warden of Merton from 1286 to 1295, and during this time Martyn was certainly Mayor from 1287 to 1288,⁶ which makes these two years the most likely date for the charters. This pair of charters clearly establishes the connection between the de Fulsham house and the

¹ See transcript (p. 61 above), section headed 'in a different ink'.

² I have not met this term before but presume that Agnes dyed yellow cloth or specialized in washing and redipping yellow hangings, etc.

³ A Robert Goodrich was Mayor of Cambridge 1402-3 and in 1398 obtained from Merton College the lease of Merton Hall (J. Milner Gray, *Biological Notes on the Mayors of Cambridge*, 1921).

⁴ J. Milner Gray, *The School of Pythagoras* (Camb. Ant. Soc. 1932), section vi, nos. 72, 73 (Merton Rec. 1602, 1601).

⁵ Merton Rec. 1601. From a photograph supplied by the kindness of Dr J. R. L. Highfield.

⁶ Milner Gray, *Mayors of Cambridge* (1921), p. 10.

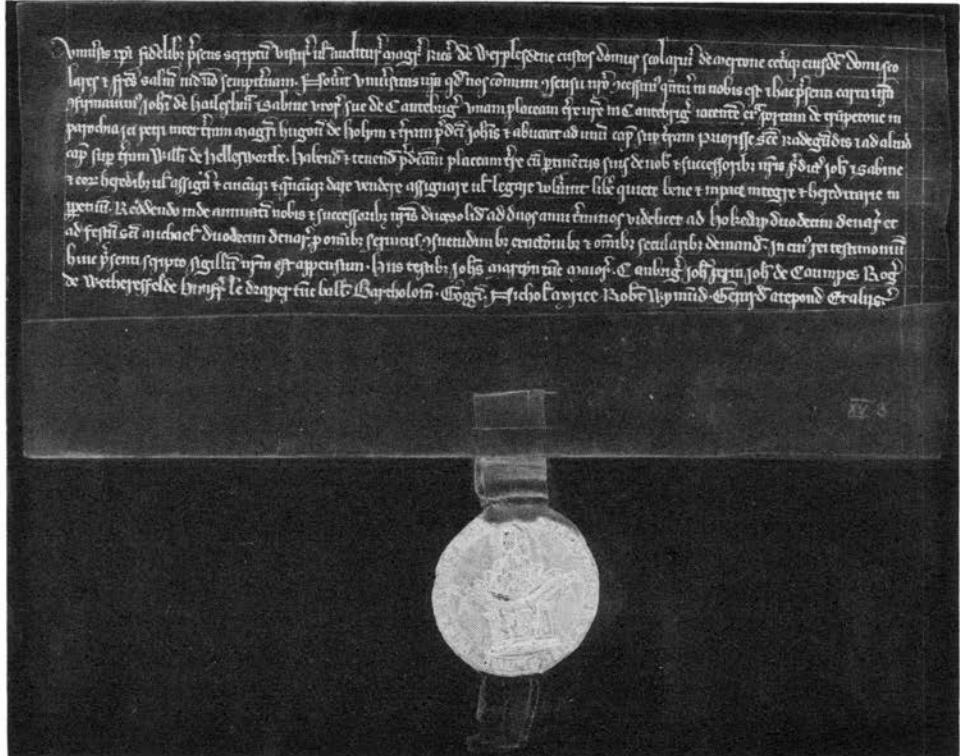


Fig. 3

College of Merton and that at the time they were written the house was in the fee of the House of Merton. Whether it had formed part of the original Dunning estate bought by Walter de Merton or whether it was added to the Cambridge properties of the House of Merton during the complicated negotiations that accompanied the purchase, I have not been able to determine.

Finally I discovered one further record in Corpus Christi College (Fig. 3). This had never been kept with its fellows in the St Peter's parish box and indeed may have been virtually lost in the miscellanea for a very long time. In the 1930s it was sent to the P.R.O. for repair on account of its fine appearance and seal, and even on its return was not catalogued or filed in its proper place. It is, in fact, the key document in the whole affair, being a grant from Merton College to John de Aylesham and Sabina his wife.¹ Strangely enough, Merton College does not appear to possess a duplicate of this charter or any record of this grant. The carelessness of both the

¹ Now C.C.C. Box xv, no. 5.

colleges concerned over this particular piece of record-keeping was to have serious consequences later on. The text of the charter runs:

Mag^r Ricardus de Werplesdene custos domus scolarii de Mertone ceterique eiusdem domi scolares et fratres [salutem etc].

Noverint universitas vestra quod nos communi consensu nostro concessimus quantum in nobis est et hac presenti carta nostra confirmavimus Johanni de Hailesham et Sabine uxori sue de Cantebrig' unam placeam terre nostre in Cantebrig' iacentem extra portam de trumpetone in parochia sancti petri inter terram magistri Hugonis de Holm at terram predicti Johannis et abutat ad unam caput super terram priorisse sancte Radegundis et ad aliud caput super terram Willelmi de Hellesworthe. Habendam et tenendam predictam placeam terre cum pertinenciis suis de nobis et successoribus nostris predictis Johanni et Sabine et eorum heredibus vel assignis et cuicunque et quocunque dare vendere assignare vel legare voluerint. libere quiete bene et in pace integre et hereditarie in perpetuum. Reddendo inde annuatim nobis et successoribus nostris duos solidos ad duos anni terminos – videlicet ad Hokeday duodecim denarios et ad festum Michaeli duodecim denarios – pro omnibus serviciis consuetudinibus exactionibus et omnibus secularibus demandis. In cuius rei testimonium huic presenti scripto sigillum nostrum est appensum. Hiis testibus Joh's Martyn tunc maior Cantebrig Joh' Peryn Joh' de Caumpes Roger de Wetheresfelde Humfr' le draper tunc ballivi Bartholom' Gogging Nichol. Morice Robt Wymund Gerard atepond Et aliis.

[Seal of Merton Hall]

Several points arise from a study of the text of this document. Firstly the dating; the list of witnesses is headed by John Martyn, mayor, as in the Merton documents already referred to, followed by the names of the four bailiffs, which are not given in the Merton documents, then the same four neighbours, Bartholomew Gogging, Nicholas Morice, Robert Wymund and Gerard atepong (de vinariis), but naturally not John de Aylesham, who is a party to the charter. The three documents must therefore be considered as contemporary and forming part of a single transaction. Presumably the Warden of Merton resumed full possession of his Trumpington Street property in order to be able to grant it freely to the de Ayleshams.

The property granted to the de Ayleshams is described as a piece of land, though the two documents in Merton refer to a messuage. Three of the neighbouring owners are the same, Hugh de Holm (formerly), Henry Pykerell (formerly) now de Aylesham, and William of Elsworth. At the west end, however, the piece of land does not extend to the high road, as the messuage did, but to the land of the prioress and convent of St Radegund. In the Hundred Rolls, a dozen years earlier than the charter, we find that the prioress and convent no longer hold directly any land or houses in St Peter's parish but collect rent-charges of one to three shillings on five or six of the properties fronting Trumpington Street, four of which had been bought by the de Ayleshams.¹ The Hundred Rolls give these rent-charges as of unknown origin, but the most

¹ *Rot. Hund.* II, pp. 359 and 371.

e.g. Item Joh' et Sabina tenant unum mesuagium in eadem parochia quod quidem dicta Sabina quondam emit de Priorissa et Conventu sancte Radegunde et inde reddunt per annum dictis P. et C. iijs Qualiter autem dicti P. et C. ad predictum mesuagium pervenerint nesciunt.

probable explanation is that the convent anciently owned a strip of land running alongside the road before the town houses spread beyond the King's Ditch. 'Terram priorisse sancte Radegunde' in the Merton charter would seem to mean that portion of the property which fronted the street, on which there was a rent-charge to the prioress and convent. The de Ayleshams must at some point have acquired the messuage right up to the street front, for by the time of John de Aylesham's death his widow undoubtedly had two adjoining houses, both fronting the street, and two adjoining gardens both reaching back to Swynescroft. Finally the rent-charge named is two shillings, not three as subsequently claimed by Merton.

Merton, as we have seen, have no record of the grant to the de Ayleshams, and the payment of the rent-charge on their property seems to have lapsed until the end of the fourteenth century. Then we hear of the attempt by Robert (or Richard) Goodrich, as farmer of the Merton properties in Cambridge, to exact three shillings from Agnes Willingham. Corpus, it would seem, were insufficiently sure of their rights in the case to try to protect their tenant, and for the time being Goodrich succeeded in exacting the rent-charge.

Between 1446 and 1462 the Merton estates in Cambridge were in the hands of King's College, under an exchange agreement which in the event was never finally carried out.¹ This arrangement cannot have been popular with Corpus Christi College, whose rights, chiefly in Grantchester, were already being encroached upon by the new and powerful royal foundation. Dr John Botwright made a summary of disputed rents at this time and endorsed it:² 'Ye damage done to us by ye New College, Col' Reg.' The return of the estates to Merton brought him further trouble, for the Merton owners suspected that they had not received all their due, and from diligent research in their records began to lay claim to any rents or properties for which they could produce evidence of former ownership. Among them was the three shillings on the house outside the Trumpington Gate.

One of the fellows of Merton was dispatched to Cambridge to issue writs against the Hospital of St John and two colleges (Clare and Corpus) on the grounds that they had usurped possession of Merton property.³ The rents and properties in dispute were referred to arbitration by four outside judges, to whom all relevant evidence of title and claims had to be submitted, as the text of the arbitration award shows.⁴

— To alle true cristen people to whom this present writyng endented shal come seen or heryn [A, B, C, & D the arbitrators] senden gretyng in our lorde god.

— Whereas John Botwright, clerk, Maistr of the College of [C.C. & B.V.M.] in Cambrigge and John Gygur clerk Wardeyn of the College of Merton in Oxenford have founden theymself that is to wete eythr partie severally to othr in xxli forto stande and obeye thawarde of us the said arbitrows

^{1,3} Gray, *School of Pythagoras*, pp. 17 and 18.

² C.C.C. Box xxxvi, Misc.

⁴ C.C.C. Box xxxvi, nos. 78 and 78*i*.

indifferently by theym chosen of and upon the right title and possession of a yerely rent of viij^s viij^d w^t sute of courte to the maner of Berton, iiij^s and ij capons and of a parcel of a mese in the parish of seynt Gyles in Cambrige and also of a yearly rent of iijs^s w^t sute of court of Merton Halle – so that our judgement be yeven before the feest of Cristmesse next comyng

– We the said arbitrows takyng upon us the charge of the seyd arbitrement the evidences and title of the seyd parties to us by them severally shewed redde and by us rypely understanden – awarde ordeyn and deme –

The memorandum which forms the subject of this paper was most probably drawn up by Botwright in connection with this arbitration. The Corpus case must obviously have been weak on two points. Firstly, Goodrich had successfully exacted the 3s. rent. Secondly, Botwright was basing his claim on the wrong house, for which he cannot have produced very good evidence of title. He must have been either unable or unwilling to produce the Merton charter and must have relied on what else remained in the muniments relating to the de Fulsham house. None of these later charters names the chief lord of the fee or states any specific rent-charge in lieu of services. Perhaps the rat was the real villain, since it had chewed away so much of the Vavassour charter, including the name of the neighbouring tenant other than the Chantry House.

At all events the final award was generally unfavourable to Corpus, for out of a total of more than 13s. 8d. in annual rents claimed, together with ownership of part of a messuage, the College received only an annual rent of 4s. from Merton, in return for abandoning all further claims.¹ The final concord with Merton, a copy of which remains in the College archives, was sealed by the four arbitrators on 4 December 1471 and was followed by a mutual exchange of quit claims on 7 December.

Thereafter all references to the house among the Corpus records cease, as far as I have been able to discover. The Pembroke College Box cannot give us the complete story either, though it is clear that this College had acquired all the area to the south of their original site by the middle of the following century. Is it possible to find any further traces of Sabina's house even after it has vanished from record evidence?

Hamond's map of 1592, as has already been mentioned, shows the site very little changed from its medieval layout. Walls and buildings for the most part follow the pattern of the Botwright sketch-map, except that the north end of the Chantry House seems to have been demolished. The further end of the Chantry House garden, as would be expected, has been divided off and forms the garden to the side of a long house running back from west to east from the Trumpington Road. This is most probably the de Fulsham house, or rather, a lengthened one on the same site.

The Winhose house, not lengthened, can be identified, and from it a long wall goes out towards Swynescroft, hiding what is presumably the line of the small lane. Although the earliest deeds of the Trumpington Road houses suggest that their

¹ This 4s. rent-charge was the subject of some correspondence between the two colleges in 1911.

gardens formerly opened directly on to Swynescroft, from the later thirteenth century a series of closes was formed, which by Hamond's time stretched in an unbroken line behind the houses. The only one named on Botwright's plan is the Garden of the White Canons, but the wording of the charter which disposes of Sabina de Fulsham's half-acre suggests that hers was immediately to the north.¹ By Hamond's time most of the closes nearest to Pembroke College had been gradually purchased by that College for gardens or orchards.

The close which had originally belonged to Sabina de Fulsham may well be the one purchased in 1389, known to Matthew Wrenn (*c.* 1620) as Cosyn's Place,² and according to him consisting of about half an acre used by the College for a garden. The name Cosyn's Place is, however, applied by Gilbert Ainslie to what is more probably the de Holm house.

No further maps or pictures of the site are available until the seventeenth century. In Loggan's print of Pembroke College (*c.* 1688) some of the garden is seen behind the new chapel. The outlines of the older sketch-map are still preserved in the arrangement of the paths in the southeast corner leading to a gate in the wall. Sabina's garden is occupied by a large flower-bed laid out like a sundial. But by this time Pembroke College Chapel, built over the whole portion fronting the street, has effaced all other traces of what went before. Last to vanish from the Cambridge scene was the little door in the wall, by which over four centuries Sabina and Avicia and Matilda and the Fellows of Pembroke College had had free entry and egress into the field called Swynescroft.

¹ C.C.C. Box xv, no. 41.

² Pembroke College Box, bundle E.

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