

THE LONDON INN OF THE ABBOTS OF WALTHAM: A REVISED RECONSTRUCTION OF A MEDIEVAL TOWN HOUSE IN LOVAT LANE

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SUMMARY

Recently demolished walls in Lovat Lane are redated to the post-medieval period and are not, as has been suggested, part of the late 12th- or early 13th-century inn of the abbots of Waltham. The documents relating to the inn are re-examined in the light of this evidence and a schematic reconstruction proposed.

Mounted on the wall of Nos. 24–5 Lovat Lane (Figs. 1, 2), before their recent demolition, was a Corporation of London plaque commemorating the site of the inn of the abbots of Waltham, built at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries as the town house of the largest Augustinian abbey in the country. The most detailed study of the inn, by the late Marjorie Honeybourne appeared in 1952¹, partly in consequence of the disclosure two years earlier of ‘several ancient walls and three vaults’ at 24 Lovat Lane. Miss Honeybourne described these features, concluding that the walls represented part of the north western area of the original inn, and then proceeded to reconstruct the plan of the inn both from these remains and from documentary evidence, notably a description made in 1540, immediately after the Dissolution².

The present paper, which arises from a subsequent re-examination of part of these structures by the Museum of London’s Department of Urban Archaeology in 1980–1³, demonstrates that the walls in question are in fact of post-medieval date and, since the inn was rebuilt between 1550 and 1562 and again after the Great Fire, are therefore an unreliable guide to the medieval plan. In this light the paper

also reassesses the description of the inn in 1540, and offers a more satisfactory reconstruction of its plan.

The walls described by Honeybourne (1952, 34–5) were of ‘chalk, brick and ragstone, 1 ft 6 ins thick up to first floor level and about 1 ft 1 ½ in thick above’. Three of the walls rose to a height of 34 ft above ground with a cellar lining 10 ft 6 in deep. She went on to say that ‘all of the walls rest on no foundation other than the natural soil, here mainly ballast’. More precisely, the investigation of 1980–1 showed that the cellar lining walls were founded on footings that nowhere extended more than 0.30 m below the cellar floors. Since the cellars cut away all stratigraphy, what had been described as ‘natural soil’ or ‘ballast’ was natural gravel. Until the recent

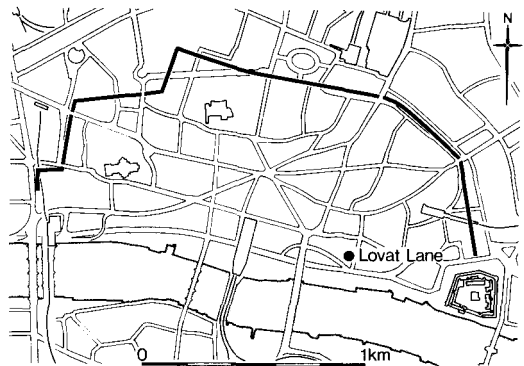


Fig. 1 Lovat Lane, 1980–1: The Lovat Lane site in the City of London.

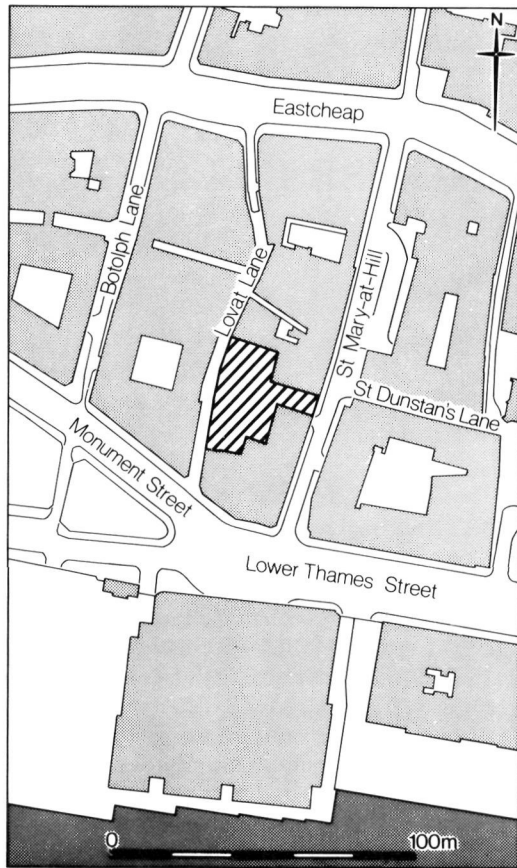


Fig. 2 Lovat Lane, 1980 – 1: Location of site in Lovat Lane.

redevelopment, fragments of almost all of the walls survived but only one is described here for reasons of brevity. The section of wall (Pl. 1) was part of the division between the cellars of Nos. 24 and 25 Lovat Lane at the point where they met the street front (right). According to Honeybourne's interpretation (Fig. 3), this wall would have separated the cellars beneath the inn's great chamber and dormitory. The wall was 1.89 m high, 1.82 m long and 0.70 m wide and was made up of a short stub of brickwork bonded into the street front wall (right) at cellar level and the main part of the wall built away from the stub in reused chalk, rag and greensand. A superficial impression of medieval work was created by

the high proportion of reused masonry including moulded blocks (a roll and hollow chamfer is arrowed in Pl. 1).

Brick was used extensively in this and in the other walls recorded by Honeybourne. She implies that brick, Tudor in date, was only found as a facing, presumably taken to indicate a secondary patching (Honeybourne, 1952, 34). In the 1980–81 observations, however, brick and brick fragments were found throughout the walls, in the core as well as in the facing. Brick was clearly an integral part of the original build. The most frequently represented brick type was the common post-medieval type, MoL fabric No. 3032⁴.

A single mortar type was found throughout the recorded walls. It was light grey in colour and included flecks of charcoal and coal. Observations in the City of London on a number of sites indicate that such ash mortars are not found in medieval building but became widespread in the 17th century and became universal after that date. Salzman cites a Westminster account of 1532 as the first documented record of their deliberate use (Salzman, 1952, 153). 'See cole' and 'Smythys Duste' were ordered for the making of 'blacker mortar requisite for the laying of Flynte'



Plate 1 Lovat Lane 1980 – 1: Fragment of walling separating basements of nos. 24 and 25 Lovat Lane.

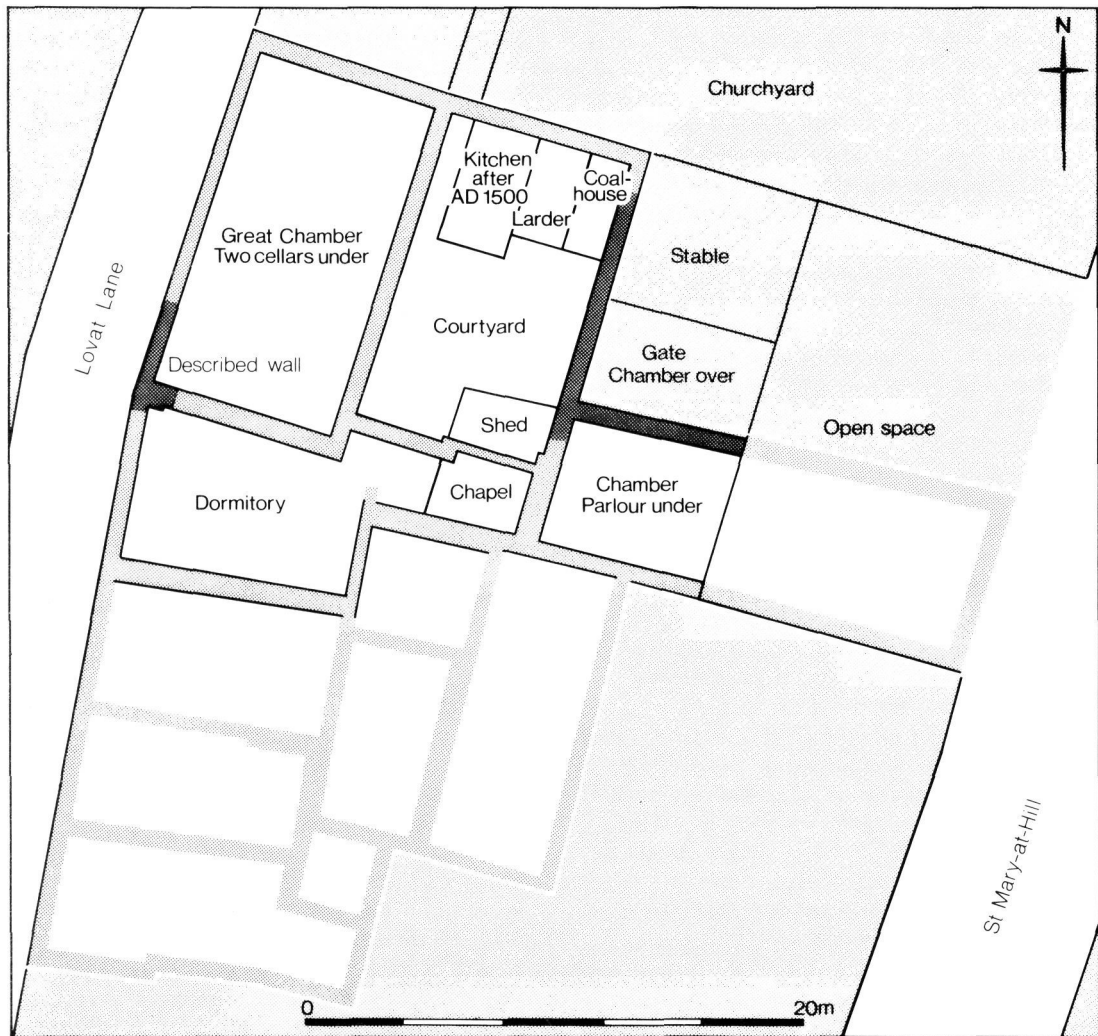


Fig. 3 Lovat Lane, 1980-1: Composite plan based on survey in 1980, with interpretation of rooms by Miss Honeybourne. KEY: Lightly shaded walls: those on which Honeybourne based her reconstruction; Darker shaded walls: those on which Honeybourne based her reconstruction, and also recorded in 1980-81.

presumably to achieve a harmonious visual effect between knapped flint and the mortar in which it was laid. Such decorative considerations might have inspired the original use of ash mortars but only in isolated cases. The real reason for their emergence was not aesthetic but technological; the replacement of the flare kiln by the running kiln as a method of lime burning. In the running kiln, the limestone or

chalk for burning was piled up in layers with the fuel-wood, charcoal or coal, while in the flare kiln these were kept separate, thus allowing the quicklime to be extracted free of any fuel waste (Davey, 1961, 98-100). It was possible to keep clean the quicklime from a running kiln if the lumps of limestone retained their shape, but by the 17th century no attempt was made to clean the lime for mortars not

intended to be visible, presumably since the existence of fuel waste in mortar makes no difference to its bonding qualities. Although no precise date can at present be ascribed to the introduction of the running kiln process it is thought to have been a post-medieval innovation⁵. The mortar used in the walls at Lovat Lane would therefore appear to be of post-medieval date.

One of the arguments cited by Honeybourne in support of her suggestion that the 'ancient walls and vaults' were those of the 12th-century inn concerns their foundations. She claims that 'no one after that date (1666) would have built on this comparatively small plot walls of such thickness (1 ft 6 ins) and on no foundation other than the natural earth, (Honeybourne, 1952, 35). She seems to be implying that a) there was no substantial building in stone on such small plots after 1666, b) that shallow foundations cut into natural are structurally unsound; and c) that a technical error of this kind could not have been made after 1666. On the first point she is basically correct, but with the second two she seems not to have taken into account the principles of foundation engineering that prevailed right up until recent times. It is clear that in the medieval and post-medieval periods foundations were not dug to any fixed depth or formula related to wall height. Instead, any foundation carrying a substantial wall and roof load was dug down until a solid subterranean stratum was reached. The use of the phrase 'search for and make foundations' (Salzman, 1952, 82) in building accounts complements the evidence of urban waterfront sites where complex arch and pile foundations were used to reach river gravels through the deep riverside reclamation dumps (Gadd and Dyson, 1981, 40–45). Absolute depth of foundation was thus not as significant as the nature of underlying ground; in favourable circumstances a shallow footing could form just as sound a foundation as one of considerable depth⁶.

Of the 'ancient walls and vaults' claimed by Honeybourne to be 12th century none that were examined are medieval: they are most likely to be post-medieval rebuilds. The only possible exception is the chalk vault that she

mentions (1952, 34) but does not describe or illustrate, and which was not identified during the Department's recent work. If the walls are post-fire rebuilds they may well represent part of Sir James Altham's rebuilding of the inn after the Great Fire. This however was the second major rebuilding of the inn since the Dissolution; Sir Thomas Blanke had bought the inn for £300 and rebuilt it at a cost of £900 some time between 1550 and 1562⁷. The walls may equally well have belonged to this first rebuilding and survived the Great Fire. In any case there is no reason why either Blank's or Altham's rebuilding should have borne much resemblance to the medieval inn as described in the Ministers' Accounts for 1540.

This detailed survey of the inn in 1540 provides most of the evidence for the plan of the medieval building. Most of the earlier evidence, which should be reviewed first, is contained in Miss Honeybourne's account of the building of the inn (1952, 35–8). This shows that land to the south of the church of St. Mary-at-Hill was acquired piecemeal, beginning with a property near the west end of the church (and thus in the area of redevelopment in 1950 and 1980–1) where the first phase of construction, a stone house, was evidently begun before 1201.

The inn can be securely placed south of the church⁸ from the reference in the parish records of 1500–1 to the closing of the little churchyard next to the Abbot's kitchen for the building of a new south aisle to the church,⁹ and by the description of the inn as 'next to the church of St. Mary-at-Hill' in the letter of 1218–24 licensing the celebration of divine service in the inn's chapel¹⁰. It cannot have extended as far south as Thames Street, as the last plot to be acquired, from Constantine, son of Alulf, is described as between the stone house of the first abbot on one side and the land of Cecilie de Billingsgate on the other¹¹. The east-west extent of the inn is not in doubt: it must have occupied the whole area between Lovat Lane and St. Mary-at-Hill.¹² In addition, two properties which were both described, in 1293, as lying south of the inn measured together 106 ft 8 in from east to west, *i.e.* the full distance between Lovat Lane and St. Mary-at-Hill¹³. The junction of St. Mary-

at-Hill with the alley that ran east from it, Cross Lane (now St. Dunstan's Lane), (Fig. 2) is described in 1294 as 'opposite the house of the abbot of Waltham'¹⁴ and the inn's great chamber is described in 1540 as fronting onto Lovat Lane.

With these details in mind, the survey of 1540 can now be re-examined. At the Dissolution, the inn along with the rest of the abbey's property, was seized by the crown and a detailed, room by room description was drawn up. This survives in the Ministers' Accounts in the Court of Augmentations. The first property described is land and a tenement

(comprising cellar, solar and *cil*) which was not part of the inn proper but was situated in the same parish.¹⁵ Reference then follows to a series of rooms, divided as they were at that time into three separate lettings, which probably comprise most of the complete building. The first letting, here designated A (see Fig. 4) comprised just 'two cellars (A1) in Love Lane under the great chamber (A2) of the great messuage called *Abbots Inne*, let for 8 shillings'.¹⁶ The second description itemizes the parts of the inn given over for the accommodation of the custodian Roger Chaloner and his wife. It is described as 'the exterior

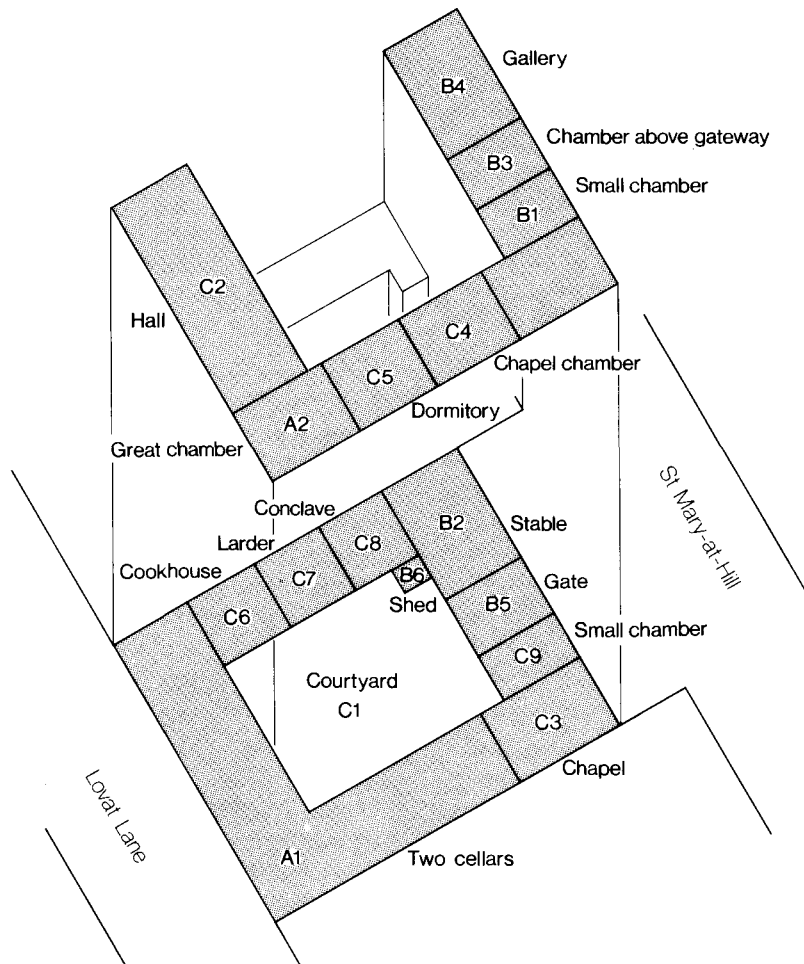


Fig. 4 Lovat Lane, 1980-1: Suggested reconstruction of the rooms of the Inn in 1540, based on the Ministers' Accounts for the Court of Augmentations. Room dimensions are conjectural.

part or front towards the plot there'. This was taken by Honeybourne (1952, 39) to mean that the inn was set back from the frontage of St. Mary-at-Hill. The extent is then defined as 'from the rectory as far as the small chamber (B1) next to the chapel chamber (C4) built above and below *viz* a certain stable (B2) that chamber (B3) above the gate (B5) of the mansion, the gallery (B4), and the shed (B6) built below next adjacent to the new *conclave* (C8)'¹⁷

The absence of punctuation creates considerable problems in understanding this passage and, even when taken together with the remainder of the document and the other evidence, does not lend itself to any single conclusive interpretation. Fig. 4 represents an attempt to make the best architectural sense of the documents but is, it should be stressed, only one of several possible reconstructions. The word *deambulatorum* suggests 'gallery' on architectural grounds rather than 'cloister' which was preferred in the original translation. Although owned by an abbey, the inn was essentially a large domestic town-house, not a monastic building. On the other hand, long galleries in the upper floors of the entrance ranges of such buildings were becoming a common feature at that date. The custodian, as would be expected, was lodged in the entrance range; the remainder of the inn, including all the chief apartments, are listed in the last entry – 'the great court (C1) called *le court yard*; hall (C2); chapel (C3); chamber called the chapel chamber (C4) built above with the dormitory (C5); cookhouse (C6); larder (C7) with a small new *conclave* (8); small chamber (C9) built below next to the great gate (B5) and coal (house) (C10)'¹⁸. The great chamber is not mentioned in either of the last two descriptions. It only appears in relation to the two cellars let separately in the first entry. This is inexplicable but cannot justify Miss Honeybourne's apparent amalgamation of great chamber and hall into one oversized great chamber.

The chapel is placed on the ground floor with a domestic chamber over since the document specifically states *le chappell chamber tam supra quam subtus* (the chapel chamber built as much above as below) and again, *capella,*

camera vocata the chappell chambre sursum edificat (chapel, chamber called the chapel chamber built above). In her chapter on the domestic chapel in the 11th and 12th centuries, Margaret Wood refers to the tradition that there was a rule against domestic rooms above the chapel but points out that even in the few surviving examples of that date there are cases where it was broken (Wood, 1965, 228). Possibly the chamber above did not cover the full length of the chapel, as at the Hospitaller commandery of Chibburn, Northumberland (Wood, 1965, 233), so that the east window could rise the full height of the gable. It is just possible, but unlikely, that the chapel chamber lay alongside the chapel rather than above it. The exact meaning of the term *conclave* is uncertain. 'Parlour' is offered by the original translator and in the most recent and comprehensive dictionary (Latham, 1981, 421) the meaning closet or lockable private room is given. Although, in any house of consequence at this date, a parlour could be expected in the sense of an additional eating and reception room, it would normally occupy the space on the ground floor beneath the great chamber (Girouard, 1978, 58–9) which in this case we know was let out separately as two cellars. If its position in the 'service' range between the larder and the stable, and with *le shedde* alongside, renders 'parlour' an improbable translation of *conclave*, then a better interpretation would perhaps be a lockable place of safe-keeping.

It has already been established that land continued to be acquired for the inn after the stone house of the first abbot has been built (above, p. 174 and Note 7). The nucleus of any great house of the late 12th century would have been the hall and solar (great chamber) and it is probable that these were contained in the first abbot's scheme. This, the first part of the inn to be constructed, must have occupied the first plot to be purchased, which lay near the west end of the church of St. Mary-at-Hill and therefore alongside Lovat Lane. The description of 1540 confirms that the great chamber, at least, lay alongside Lovat (or Love) lane. This account also indicates that the great chamber lay above two cellars, so from all this evidence it is possible to suggest that the form

of the building developed conventionally from a late 12th-century stone upper hall house of the type summarised by Wood (1965, 16–35) as comprising hall and solar above storage cellars in the (eventual) western range. This would have expanded rapidly into a courtyard type house with the acquisition of the land to the east as far as the lane of St. Mary-at-Hill, and with the addition of further accommodation and a chapel in the southern range; a domestic northern range with cook-house and larder, presumably adjacent to the low end of the hall; and an eastern entrance range with gatehouse and stable.

NOTES

1. Miss Honeybourne's paper was also based on material from her M.A. thesis, *The extent and value of property in London and Southwark occupied by the religious houses . . . before the dissolution of the monasteries* University of London 1929.
2. Cf. G. R. Corner's transcription and translation of the Ministers' Accounts in the Court of Augmentations (Corner, 1856, 406–7 and 416–7). Corner, however, failed to deal adequately with the problems presented by the absence of punctuation in the lists of rooms. In places his translation makes architectural nonsense, as where, for example, he places the stable in a chamber above the gateway.
3. The Department would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Ltd. and in particular to Mrs. Mikola Wilson for providing both generous financial support and facilities for the Department's work.
4. The type number, 3032, refers to the Museum of London's brick type series. I am grateful to Ian Betts and Barbara Ford for arranging the identification.
5. My thanks are due to John Evans of NELP for allowing me to draw heavily on his work on ash mortars to appear shortly in P. Drury, 'The Temple of Claudius at Colchester' *Britannia* 15 (1984).
6. Salzman (1952, 83) quoted an account by William Botoner of Worcester, writing c. 1480, of the subsoil of houses near the cemetery of St. Stephen, Bristol, which was so unsuitable that the builders allegedly had to dig down 47 ft.
7. *Inquisitions Post Mortem (London)*: Pt. III, 19–45 Elizabeth 1577–1603 (London, 1908) 136.
8. C. L. Kingsford apparently placed the inn on the wrong (east) side of St., Mary-at-Hill probably having mistaken other property owned by Waltham in the same parish for the inn itself (Kingsford 1920, 52 and 1916, 56).
9. *Records of St. Mary-at-Hill* Early English Text Society Original Series 125 and 128, I, 240, 391.
10. British Library, Harleian MS 391, f. 120 transcribed by Corner (1856, 404–5 and 415).
11. Honeybourne (1952) 38, Note 2.
12. See Note 2 above.
13. From an unpublished deed in City of London Record Office, the Husting Roll 22/20, 22 (pers. comm. Tony Dyson).
14. *Ibid.*, 23/8.
15. This is probably the property on the east side of St. Mary-at-Hill mistaken by Kingsford for the inn itself (Kingsford 1916, 56 and 1920, 52). The meaning of the word *cil* is as much a mystery now as it was to the original translator. It may be derived from the verb *ciliare*, to hood (Latham, 1981, 337) but any suggestion beyond that would be guesswork.

16. . . . et de vijis de firma duorum cellariorum iacentium in Love Lane situata sub magna camera magni mesuagii vocati Abbatis Inne . . . (loc. cit. in Note 3).
17. . . . de firma exterioris parte sive fronte magni mesuagii sive mansionis vocati Abbatis Inne parochia predicta scituatum et existens pro quidam scituant' versus placeam ibidem videlicet a rectoria ibidem usque parvam cameram proxime adjacentem le chappell chamber tam supra quam subius edificat' scilicet quoddam stabulum camera illa super januam mansionis predicte edificat' deambulorum atque le shedde unacum proiec' tente subius edificat' proxime adiacens nove conclati ibidem . . .
18. . . . magne curie vocate le court yard aule capelle camere vocate the chappell chambre sursum edificat' simulcum dormitorio coquina lardario cum parvo novo conclate parca camera subius proxime adiacentis magne porte, necnon domoque carbonis . . .

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