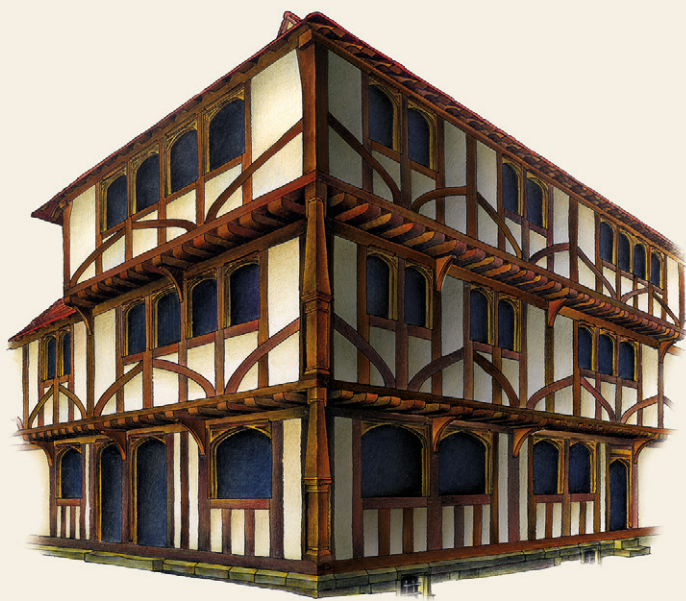


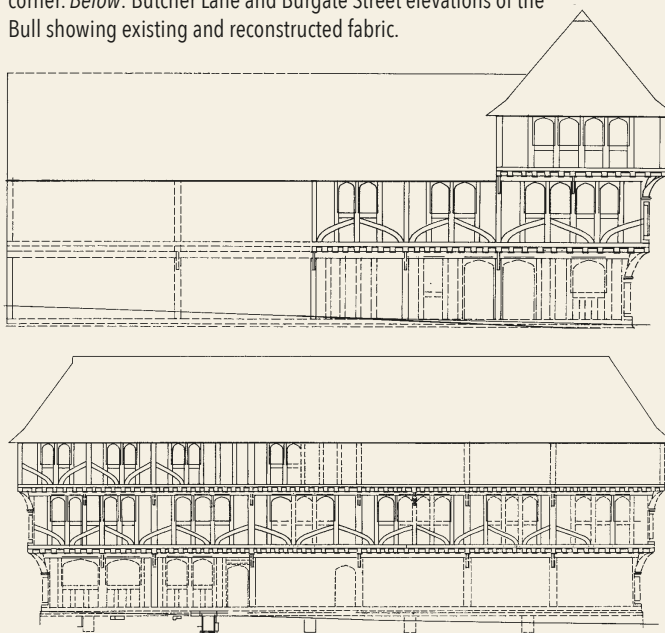
# The Pilgrim Inns of Canterbury



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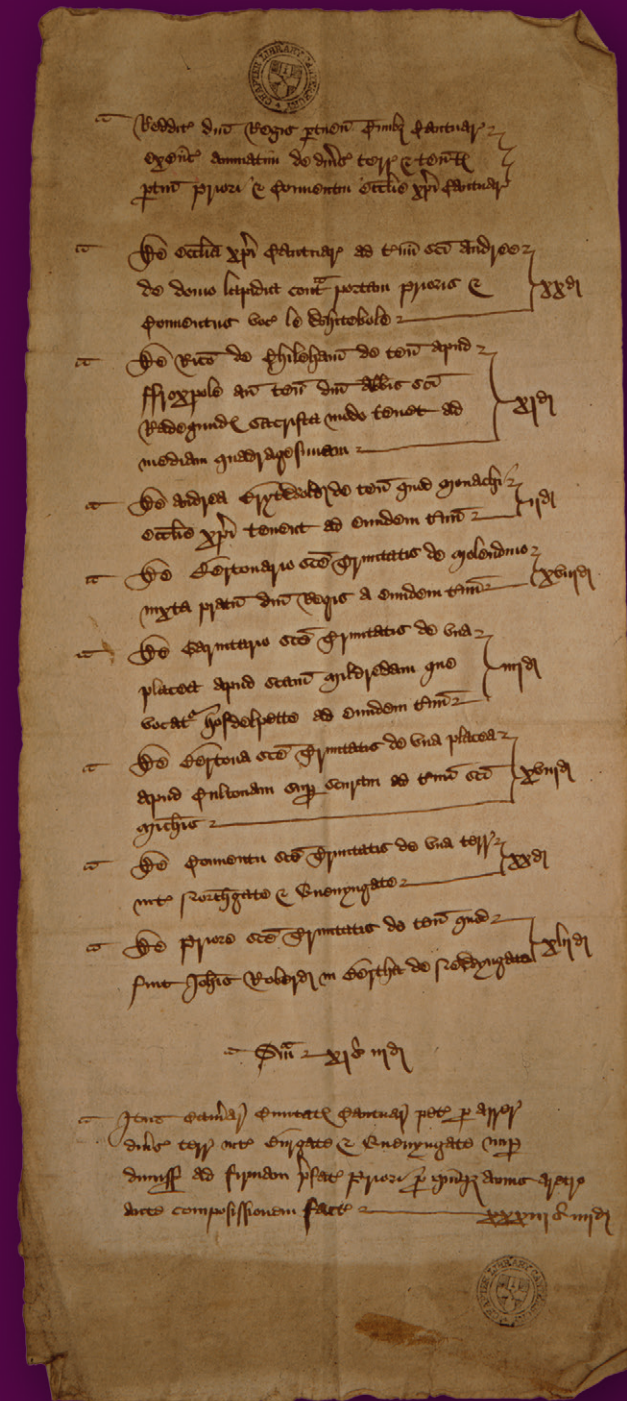


Perspective reconstruction of the Whit Bull at the Butchery Lane - Burgate corner. Below: Butcher Lane and Burgate Street elevations of the Bull showing existing and reconstructed fabric.



The information and reconstruction drawings in this leaflet are a bi-product of a long term study of the city's surviving medieval buildings by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. Our work on the 'pilgrim inns' was assisted by a generous grant made by Mr Martin Starkie, Director of Canterbury's Chaucer Festival.

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Christ Church Priory rental No. 71 (c1370) mentioning the White Bull (line 6). By kind permission of the Centre for Kentish Studies and the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.

As befits the premier place of pilgrimage in Britain, later medieval Canterbury had a large number of inns, taverns and lodging houses as well as the official places of hospitality (the monastic guest-houses and almonries) and the hospitals (like Eastbridge Hospital).

The most famous of all was known as **'The Cheker of the Hope'**, a great courtyard inn to the west of Mercery Lane. This inn, erected by Christ Church Priory during the last few years of Geoffrey Chaucer's life, is mentioned as the setting for bawdy scenes in a continuation of the Canterbury Tales (*The Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*). A contemporary chronicle records that in 1392: "was begun the new inn in the town, called the Cheker at an outlay of £174 14s 4d". The work took three years and cost in total £867 14s 4d. In 1533, just before the destruction of Becket's shrine, an inventory of goods in the Cheker refers to various rooms in the building by names such as 'the King's Chamber', the 'White Hart' and 'St George's Chamber'.

Most of the eastern side of this splendid inn survives, even though the western two-thirds of the building was destroyed in a great fire in the city in 1865. The inn was shown in some earlier plans and drawings as a large galleried building around a central courtyard. Parts of the first floor gallery overlooking the internal courtyard still survive. Timber-work in this area bears traces of original decoration in gold paint and three gallery windows, one charred by fire, were recently uncovered here. Two of the original traceried window-heads can still be seen high above the southern end of Mercery Lane. Magnificent roofs still survive on this side and a unique stone arcade for shops on the ground floor is still much in evidence. In the mid eighteenth century William Gostling wrote:

*"The corner shop indeed shows, by arches each way, in what manner the ground floor was built, and some were adjoining them within the memory of man,... Going through the gate of it we find on our left a staircase leading up to a gallery which probably went round the whole court when larger than it is now. Another also appears to have been above it, but it has now become part of the several houses which wanted the room these galleries took up."* (*'Walk in and about the City of Canterbury'* 1st ed. 1777)

Below the shops was a series of stone cellars which had high grated windows on the street, some of which survive.

Immediately north of the Cheker in Mercery Lane was another inn called **'The Crown'**. In 1535 a room in this building was known as 'Sandwyck Chamber'. This inn also still survives and its large vaulted cellars are now a restaurant in Debenhams.



This reconstructed view, based on surviving medieval buildings, documentary and cartographic evidence, shows the centre of the city on the eve of the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century.

The 'Cheker of the Hope' inn lies left of centre, against the intersection of the High Street and Mercery Lane. The remaining half which retains part of its original ground floor stone arcade is now occupied by Ratner and Oliver. The garden of the Cheker is shown to the rear of the building. Constricting the High Street, in the bottom centre of the view, is St. Andrew's Church, demolished in 1763. The church lower left is St

Mary Bredman, extant by 1200, rebuilt in 1822, and finally demolished in 1900.

On the corner of St Margaret's Street, opposite St Andrew's Church, is a fine jettied building now occupied by Next. This structure probably contained shops on the ground floor with apartments above. Another late medieval shop with accommodation above, now Dewhurst, survives west of the Cheker. The building to the left of this shop, with a continuous row of windows under the eaves was 'The Red Lion Inn'. Behind it was the city's Guildhall, regrettably demolished in 1950.

Drawn by J A Bowen





Early photograph showing the aftermath of the great fire of 1865.  
Reproduced by kind permission of Canterbury Group, Kents Arts and Libraries.

Opposite the top end of Mercery Lane, adjoining the Christ Church Gate on the east, was **‘The Sun’** (a name which only seems to have been applied this century to the present jeweller’s shop further down Sun Street). This building was also erected by Christ Church Priory in 1437-8 and is well documented in the Cathedral Archives. Today much of the upper part of this building is occupied by the Cathedral Gate Hotel and many traces of the massive timbers for this structure can be seen inside. This building too was damaged by a fire during the early nineteenth century and the eastern end (now Cornell, the jewellers) has been considerably rebuilt. However a vaulted cellar survives below the building, two well-preserved windows were recently recorded on the second floor at the rear of the building (now covered by hanging tiles) and, most noteworthy, is the unique, twin crown-plate roof. ‘The Sun’ was mainly used as a tavern (or ‘wine tavern’ in 1617) and leases for it were recorded from 1438 until 1661. A model of part of the facade of the building, made in 1779, survives in the Cathedral Library.

‘The Sun’ faced the area now known as the Buttermarket, earlier known as **‘The Bullstake’**. This name derived from a stake in the centre to which unfortunate animals were tied for baiting in the belief that this made the meat more tender! in 1446 however, a fine market cross was erected in the middle of the open space and William Somner recorded that on it was a brass inscription which read:

*“John Coppyn of Whitstabbell, in great Devotion, And William Bigg of Canterbury, in Christ’s Passion, Did do made this cross, in Heaven God them solace, MCCCC and XLVI in the Year of Grace”*

This cross, a large structure shown in detail in the bottom left-hand corner of the “Mapp of Canterbury” published 1703, was pulled down by a puritan mayor in 1645. Nicholas Battely tells us that the lead roof covering was then coined into farthings.

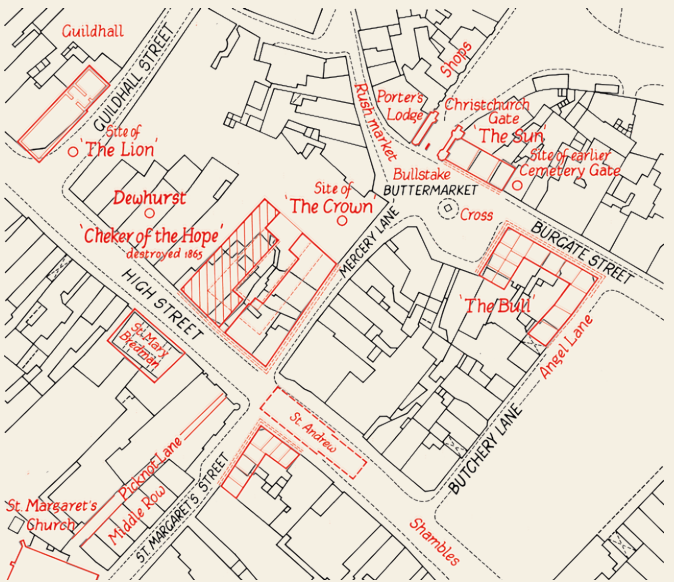
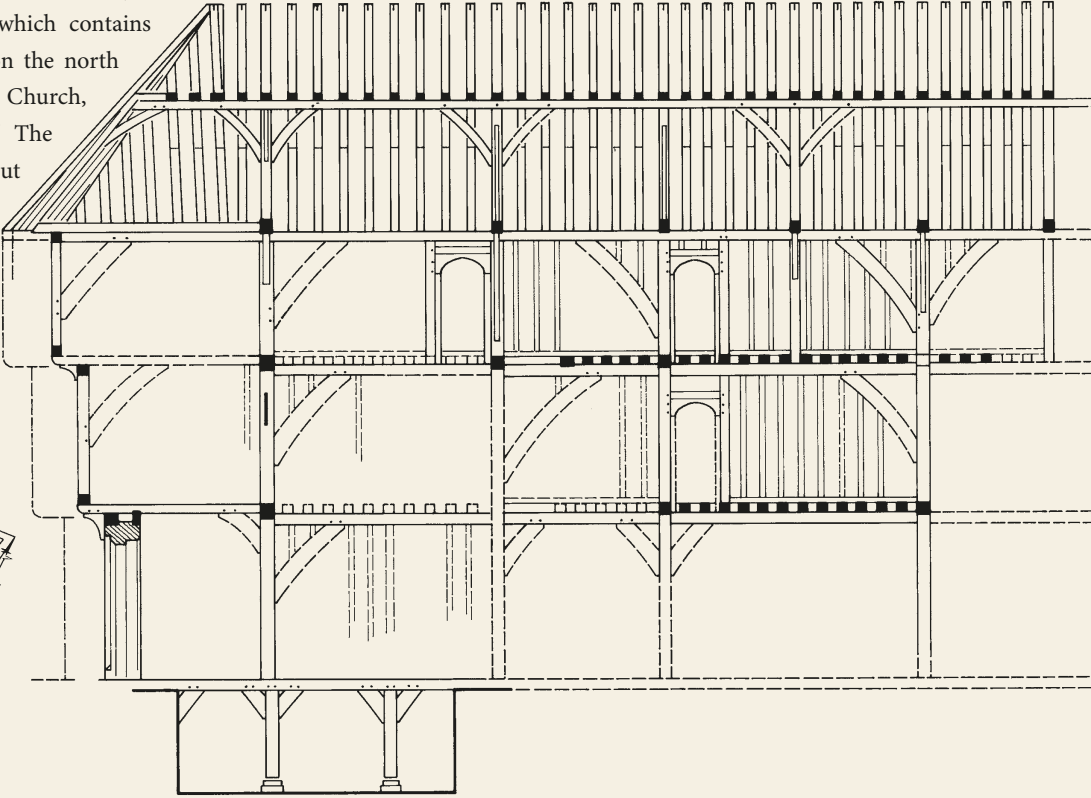
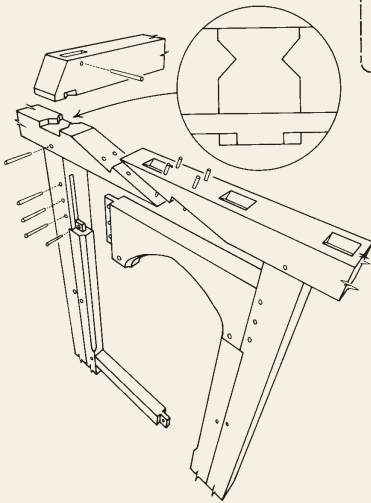
On the southern and eastern sides of this open space was **‘The Bull Inn’**. This was rebuilt in its present form in the mid-fifteenth century. The obituary of Prior Goldstone 1 (1449-68) (published in H. Wharton, “*Anglia Sacra*” (1691)) tells us that the Prior built near the cemetery gate of the Priory “*unum aedificium lignium plures mansione constituens vocatum anglice Le Bole*” (i.e. a wooden building, containing many lodgings, called in English ‘The Bull’). This inn was built around a courtyard and had three main ranges.

On the west was double-jettied range facing the Buttermarket (Bullstake) which appears to have had original brick fireplaces on the eastern side, clearly the best rooms in the building. The north range, also double-jettied, face onto Burgate Street and the single-jettied eastern range faced onto Butchery Lane (formerly Sunwin’s or Angel Lane). All the lodgings in the building were above shops on the ground floor and each group appears to have had a separate staircase as in the Colleges at Oxford and Cambridge or the Inns of Court in London, which all had similar origins. Many details of the framing, windows, doors, partitions, etc. can still be seen.

The name ‘The Bull’ or ‘The White Bull’ goes back at least one hundred years earlier, given to ‘the great stone house’ on the site, built by the Priory at the end of the twelfth century. In a rental of c1200 this building is referred to as the ‘Great Stone House’ and in the City fee farm document (1234) it is recorded as ‘the stone house opposite the old gate’ (i.e. the Cemetery Gate). A rental of c1370 (No 71 in the Cathedral Library) refers to a rent of 20 pence for the building ‘*in the corner of St Andrew’s parish, called the Whitebull*’. In the lower parts of the largely fifteenth century stone cellars under Cranfields can be seen some remains of the late twelfth century stone cellar walls.

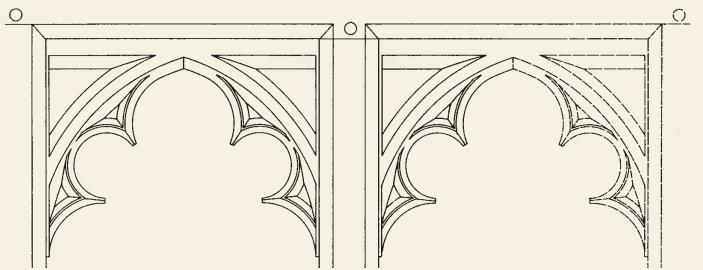
In the fifteenth century the Cathedral Priory owned several other inns in Burgate Street, including **‘The Porpoise’**, **‘The Dolphin’** and **‘The Mitre’**. In addition to the Inns owned by the Priory there were several others, including **‘The Lion’**. This inn, adjoining the Guildhall on the east, purchased by the City in 1408, was rebuilt in the early fifteenth century ‘*with several considerable alterations*’, then destroyed by the building of Guildhall Street in 1806. Another group of late medieval lodgings was located in the buildings on the corner of St Margaret’s Street (Nos 25-6) and The Parade (Nos 8-9). This building is another double-jettied structure, with L-shaped plan, which contains the remains of many lodgings. on the north it originally faced St Andrew’s Church, which stood in the centre of The Parade at the end of a Shambles but this was all removed in 1763.

Tim Tatton-Brown 1990



Plan of Buttermarket area showing the location of the principal pilgrim inns.

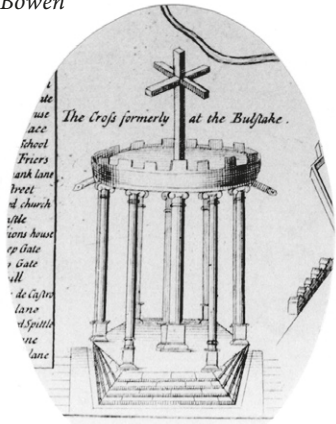
Internal section through the Mercery Lane range of the Cheker of the Hope inn, showing original fabric, with details of gallery window tracery and a door-frame assembly.



This reconstructed view of the Buttermarket area in the mid sixteenth century shows the Christ Church Gate, top centre. The gate, built by 1517, incorporates some of the earliest Renaissance detail surviving in the city.

Just inside the Cathedral Precincts is a row of timber-framed shops. In front of the gate is the Buttermarket, then called the ‘Bullstake’. To the left of the gate is the porter’s lodge, a fine, jettied timber building, parts of which still survive and to the right is ‘The Sun Inn’. Substantial parts survive as Pizzaland and the Cathedral Gate Hotel. At the centre of the view, adjoining Buttermarket, is ‘The Bull Inn’. Liberty, Cranfield, Laura Ashley and Talisman now trade in this ancient building. On the opposite side of Buttermarket, top left, was the Rush Market, now called Sun Street. Leading from the Christ Church Gate, left to the High Street, is narrow Mercery Lane. ‘The Crown Inn’ occupied the Buttermarket end of the lane on the right-hand side.

Drawn by J A Bowen



The market cross as shown in a separate detail of ‘The mapp of Canterbury’ for 1703.



Eighteenth-century engravings of the Cheker. Above: the courtyard with gateway opening onto High Street. Below: part of the upper floor interior.

