The Topography of Illicit Sex in Later Medieval English Provincial Towns

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Helen Kavanagh, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation seeks out the locations of illicit sex and punishment in later medieval English towns. This thesis will look at all types of illicit sex, including prostitution, adultery, concubinage, premarital sex, rape and incest, and will attempt to determine if there were certain areas within towns where these types of sex took place. Further, this thesis will look at who punished sexual transgression, and where punishment took place, to assess whether topography played a part in deterring non-marital sex.

This thesis looks at a representative selection of Southern English towns, organised by type. In chapter 1, I look at the university town of Oxford, and in particular focus on *Gropecunt Lane*. Chapter 2 is also focused on a university town, Cambridge, and questions how university Chancellors dealt with prostitution. Chapter 3 will then concentrate on the cathedral towns of Norwich and Hereford, and investigate clerical sex. Finally, chapter 4 looks at the market towns of Bury St Edmunds, Shrewsbury, Great Yarmouth, Gloucester and Colchester, and evaluates how the layout of the market encouraged illicit sex in certain areas, a theme which also arises in earlier chapters. Throughout the thesis, questions will be asked about sexualised street names, and whether these were a clear indication of illicit goings-on.

The primary conclusion drawn in this thesis is that illicit sex was (or was seen as), taking place in specific areas in towns, within the town walls, near the main market or busiest areas, and was not 'marginal'. Furthermore, illicit sex was often punished in these areas, presumably to act as a deterrent to perpetrators, and these punishments were usually in the way of fines or public humiliation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cal CR *Calendar of the Close Rolls, Preserved in the Public Record Office*

Cal IM *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery) Preserved in the Public Record Office*

Cal PR *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Preserved in the Public Record Office*

CRC *Court Rolls of the Borough of Colchester* (3 vols)

CUHB *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Volume I: 600-1540

NRO Norfolk Record Office, Norwich

OWL Weston Library, Oxford

Supp AP *Supplications, from England and Wales in the Registers of the Apostolic Penitentiary, 1410-1503* (3 vols)

TNA   The National Archives, Kew

VCH The Victoria History of the Counties of England

VDL *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln* (3 vols)

INTRODUCTION

grīpen (v.) Forms: **grīpeth** & **gripth**; p. **grōp**, **grāp**, **grēp**, **græp**; sg. 2 **grēpe**; pl. **gripen**, **grōpen**, **grēpen**, **grupen**; ppl. **gripen**, **grōpe**, **igrope**, **grēpe**:

1.(a) To grasp with the hands, take hold of, grab, snatch up, to hold on, cling; to encircle with the hands; **hand in hand with**, to clasp the hand of.

2. To catch, capture, seize; to obtain (property, wealth), seize; receive (a gift, bribe, reward), take; help oneself to (someone's gold); to learn about; of fear, horror, etc.: come upon, afflict; of the Devil, a personified vice, etc.: overcome, ensnare.[1]

The medieval meaning of the word 'grope' is still recognisable today. The definition above provided by the Medieval English Dictionary online database, acknowledges many meanings of the word still with us: to grasp with the hands, to grab. What did it mean in a street name? This thesis will look at the topography of particularly sexually named streets (such as *Gropecunt Lanes*) alongside other infamously illicit areas, and discuss whether these streets had become synonymous with illicit sexual encounters and prostitution, and were the primary sites of such encounters. This thesis will also discuss types of sexual encounters that occurred in these areas and whether such types of illicit sex reflect the secondary meanings of 'grope-cunt' as obtaining property, helping oneself to or even being scared of something. Overall, this thesis questions if there were particular streets designated for illicit sex and prostitution in medieval English towns, if these streets had nationally recognised street names, and if so, were these streets tolerated by local councils?

This thesis looks at the conclusions that may be drawn about the topography of illicit sexual activity in medieval English provincial towns from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, by analysing a series of case studies across England. I have chosen the following towns as they represent a variety of town types: Oxford and Cambridge represent university towns, Norwich and Hereford stand for cathedral towns, and finally Bury, Shrewsbury, Great Yarmouth, Gloucester and Colchester are discussed as market

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[1] The medieval meaning of 'Grope', taken from *Middle English Dictionary*, < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED19500/track?counter=4&search_id=1194858> [accessed 11 July 2019].

towns, so that various types of local authorities and specific clientele (such as students or travellers) are covered. In addition, the towns chosen for the sample all rank highly by tax-paying population in the 1377 Poll Tax: they all have from around two thousand to four thousand recorded tax payers, and are therefore ranked in the top twenty-five of a possible eighty-five recorded towns (not including London, which is ranked first).[2] As none of these towns had received 'city status' until the 1540s, I have therefore referred to them in this thesis as 'towns'.[3]

In analysing these towns, questions will be raised about whether there were synonymous 'red light districts' prevalent in towns, and whether these followed certain topographical patterns and had similar names nationally. It will also raise questions about the social and geographical implications of prostitution, in addition to looking at the theoretical, legal and moral condemnations of prostitution and brothel- keeping. In addition, this thesis will use a topographical study of street names and the location of the streets associated with prostitution in an attempt to draw conclusions about who the clients of prostitutes were in addition to who were the perpetrators of clerical sex, adultery, incest and rape amongst other forms of illicit sexual activity. Overall, this thesis will question where illicit sex was happening in medieval towns, who was involved, who was trying to police it, and what punishments perpetrators could expect to endure. In doing so, this thesis hopes to draw conclusions about how far certain types of illicit sex were taking place in certain areas, and what this tells us about the town's government. Although 'illicit sex' may be difficult to define, for the purpose of this study I have assumed that this covers all types of sexual conduct forbidden by Canon law, or deemed morally wrong by ecclesiastical authorities in medieval Europe. For the most part, this means any sexual relationship outside of the traditional husband and wife scenario. As such, this covers (but is not limited to) homosexuality, transsexuality, adultery, clerical sex, prostitution, concubinage, pre-marital sex, sodomy, rape and incest.

This study expands upon previous research into medieval prostitution and sex, conducted predominately by Ruth Mazo Karras, Jacques Rossiaud, Nigel Baker and

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[2] Alan Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).

[3] See Heather Swanson, *Medieval British Towns* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999) for more on the definition of a medieval town. The first of the towns studied to achieve city status as granted by a monarch was Gloucester in 1541. Alan Dyer defines a 'small town' as a town with a population of fewer than 2,500 in 1700 and which had a public market. See Alan Dyer, 'Small Towns in England, 1600-1800', in *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland: Change, Convergence and Divergence*, ed. by Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 53- 67 (p. 53).

Richard Holt. Their research has variously focused upon European medieval prostitution and upon the prevalence of *Gropecunt Lane* in England.[4] Historians have looked at larger towns such as Southwark, Sandwich, Bristol, York, and London, in addition to Italy, France and Germany, although there has been little research into middle-sized towns in England outside London. This dissertation will therefore discuss 'casual' sexual connections in middle-sized towns in England, and their links to prostitution.

The thesis will further build and extend on research about sexualised street names. Some research has been conducted into the significance of the name *Gropecunt Lane* which occurs in five of the nine towns investigated below. The location of these streets, and other sexualised streets, leads to conclusions about the lives of the women engaging in prostitution, alongside their clientele and views of the town's authorities. Holt and Baker have researched *Gropecunt Lanes* across medieval English towns and suggest that sexualised street-names were a clear indication of sexual business.[5] In some towns, the lane's name varied, and 'Grape Lane' in Coventry was apparently notorious for commercial sex in the fifteenth century.[6] It was referred to as *Grapecunt Lane* in contemporary sources, much like Oxford.[7] Holt and Baker have looked specifically at the geography and the recurrence of *Grope Lane* in different medieval towns. They argue that these street names came into use simply through popular reference, and if this is so these streets must therefore have been named after the sexual activities taking place there.[8]

Whilst they admit that more research needs to be undertaken, they indicate that *Grope Lanes* may be found in London, Norwich, Bristol, York, Shrewsbury, Oxford, Newcastle, Worcester, Hereford, Wells, Reading, Banbury, Whitby and Orford. The streets themselves followed simple patterns: they were often narrow, much more like dark passageways or alleyways than actual streets, and were always directly positioned next to a town's commercial centre and near to churches, suggesting that travellers,

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[4] Ruth M. Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988)

[5] R. Holt and N. Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter: Prostitution in English Medieval Towns,' in *Indecent Exposure: Sexuality, Society and Archaeological record*, ed. by L. Bevan (Fife: Cruithne Press, 2001), pp. 201-216 (pp. 210-213).

[6] P. J. P Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes: Street Walking in Comparative Perspective,' in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. by K. J. Lewis, N. J. Menuge & K. M. Philips (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Ltd, 1996), pp. 172-195 (p. 177).

[7] Ibid., pp. 172-195 (p. 188).

[8] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 201.

parishioners and clergy routinely resorted to prostitutes.[9] Moreover, they were nearly always found in close proximity to the town's market place, High Street or public quay, and although prostitutes were described as 'marginal,' the streets themselves were neither marginal nor suburban. This may indicate the opportunism of the women themselves, or perhaps, as Baker and Holt argue, it portrays the simple fact that, in reality, prostitution was not marginal at all. As they say, 'these streets could have scarcely been more centrally located', as at Oxford. The only exception to this rule discovered by Baker and Holt is Bristol, where the road in question appears to have been outside the walls of the town.[10]

In her work on early medieval York, Sarah Rees Jones also notes a connection between prostitution and the town's topography. She argues that by 1329 the 'Lane of St Benedict' had become *Gropecuntlane*, because by the 1320s the churchyard of St. Benedict 'was falling into disrepute' as an area associated with sex workers. By 1364, the lane's name had evolved to the politer *Graplane*, and today is referred to as *Grapelane*. Overall, she suggests that the area likely attracted prostitutes because the area of Petergate, around Stonegate ward, had a large number of taverns which would have held courtiers and soldiers during the Scottish Wars between 1296 and 1328. Taverns were believed to attract prostitution, and as will be discussed, authorities in both Oxford and Colchester were concerned about taverns and alewives. This conclusion reflects towns I have researched in this thesis. In most cases, *Grope Lanes* in these towns were in the market place, with access to a large number of taverns and therefore punters. In addition, York is not the only town in which the name has survived: in Shrewsbury too, the name has proved somewhat resilient, and in Oxford a petition by local residents successfully had the street renamed *Grove Street* temporarily in the nineteenth century.[11] For the most part however, the lanes were renamed by the seventeenth century. In Norwich, the street became *Opie Street*, and in Bristol it was changed to *Hallier's Lane*.[12]

This dissertation draws on Holt, Baker and Jones' findings, but goes further than current research by assessing the location of *Gropecunt Lane* alongside other sexualised street names, and against towns where no sexual street name existed, and questions

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[9] Ibid., pp. 202-203.
[10] Ibid., p. 208.
[11] Sarah Rees Jones, *York, The Making of a City, 1068-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 304-305.
[12] Richard Coates and Jennifer Scherr, 'Some Place-Names in Medieval and Early-Modern Bristol', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 129 (2011), 155-196 (p. 162).

whether these streets were really 'centrally located' and whether there is any evidence that illicit sex actually took place there. The case-studies in this thesis will differ from Holt and Baker's in approach, looking in depth at the topographical situations of these streets against where other streets were located in the towns, to draw conclusions about the streets' involvement with sexual activity. Further, the thesis will discuss whether there is evidence that women did solicit there, and how far other streets in these towns may encourage or contradict the argument that sex took place specifically in sexualised streets. Further, it will look at the history of the street names in these towns, to see how these streets evolved over time, and whether occupational streets can support the idea that streets were named after the activity taking place there.

Overall, this thesis will gather evidence from nine towns: Oxford, Cambridge, Norwich, looking at both topographical and written evidence. These towns have provided some interesting conclusions about illicit sex, and these are drawn together in a number of tables. Logistically, I have looked at illicit sexuality in towns according to town type. Firstly, the thesis will discuss the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge. These towns are the only two of similar town 'type' which I have not collated into a single chapter, because they have provided significantly more evidence than the other towns studied, and therefore have been discussed in separate chapters. My third chapter will address the cathedral towns of Norwich and Hereford, which were dissimilar in terms of size, though provide interesting conclusions about illicit sex as both had a *Gropecunt Lanes*. Finally, the thesis will assess the importance of the marketplace by looking at the medieval market towns of Bury St Edmunds, Colchester, Great Yarmouth, Gloucester and Shrewsbury.

Definitions and Terminology

As each chapter focuses on specific case studies by town type, it may be helpful to introduce the theological ideas about sex and define my terminology in this introduction. Ruth Mazo Karras states that, in medieval Europe, prostitution was seen as a necessary evil. Whilst the Church may condemn prostitution as a sin, theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas used the 'lesser evil' argument, saying that physical pleasure was

evil: 'physical pleasures because of their intensity need to be controlled and checked.'[13] This was reinforced by Augustine of Hippo's argument that whilst prostitution was evil, it was necessary to maintain social order: 'What is filthier, uglier and more disgraceful than whores, procurers, and such-like plagues of humanity? Remove prostitutes from social order, however, and lust will destroy it.'[14]

Prostitution was therefore regulated rather than driven out in towns such as Southwark, Colchester and London, and ecclesiastical and secular courts dealt with fines that affected social disorder such as prostitution. However, terminology in the English records that do survive is often unclear, and whilst a woman may be named as a prostitute in Latin, *meretrix*, it is often unclear whether the women themselves were 'professional' prostitutes: women who sold sexual services for financial payment as their primary means of earning money, or where employed to work in municipally owned brothels. *Meretrix* is the commonest Latin word that appears in the case of prostitution, though Moore argues that by the Middle Ages, this term included any woman who behaved scandalously and so *publica meretrix* was introduced to show that the woman was available for money.[15] *A Medieval Latin-English Dictionary*, compiled by Florent Tremblay using fifteenth-century manuscripts defines *meretrix* simply as 'an hoore, a common woman. A hore', showing that by the 1400s the word did not just mean 'prostitute' in England.[16] Additionally, the term 'whore' (*scortum* or *lupa*) was never fully defined and did not necessarily mean a professional prostitute, although to confuse matters further, the dictionary defines *scortum* as 'meretrix'.[17] *Whore* was used commonly as a derogatory term for a woman who had engaged in scandalous activity, for example by having an affair or through a long term relationship with a priest, even if the two of them had conceived children. Furthermore, the term 'whore' could be an indication of an unwed mother. [18] Karras argues that a 'whore' was so widely used, that it simply became the opposite of a 'chaste' woman, a woman who abstained from sex

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[13] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Vol 20: Pleasure*, ed. by E. D'Arcy (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975), p. 15.

[14] St Augustine, *On Order [De Ordine]*, 2.14.12, trans. by Silvano Borruso (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), p.65.

[15] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 90.

[16] Florent Tremblay, *A Medieval Latin-English Dictionary Based on a Set of Unpublished 15th Century Manuscripts, Medulla Grammaticae/ Marrow of Grammar, kept in the British Museum Library* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p. 280.

[17] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 27. Tremblay, p. 394. Tremblay's *Medieval Latin- English Dictionary* defines *Lupa* only as 'a she wolfe', although refers to a *Lupanarium* as 'an horehous'. See Tremblay, p. 265.

[18] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 27 and Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 111.

unless married, and when married only engaged in sex for procreation.[19] Because of this, evidence of fornication or scandal did not necessarily indicate professional prostitution; instead it could be evidence of the woman having a bad reputation, or imply that a woman had a relationship with a man she had been unable to marry, even if the couple thought of themselves as wed.[20] Overall, the terms 'whore,' 'meretrix' and 'prostitute' appear to have been interchangeable, and were used by society to shame scandalous women. Likewise, women who worked in taverns and inns may be referred to as 'bawds' and 'procuresses' regardless of whether they had any involvement in prostitution.[21]

Furthermore, there appears to be some confusion over the definition of 'incontinence' which is important as courts punished 'incontinent' women differently to adulterers, prostitutes or scolds, although no nationwide understanding of the term 'incontinent' existed for these courts to differentiate perpetrators. Karras suggests that the use of 'incontinent' against *meretrix* shows that 'incontinent' women must not have been professional prostitutes, although as *meretrix* could also refer to scandalous women, the line may be more blurred. Medieval courts such as the Chancellor's Court in Oxford stated that incontinent women should be banished from the towns to protect the moral integrity of the townspeople, churchmen and students, encouraging the idea that 'incontinent' women lacked self-control over sexual desire.[22] Aristotle believed that incontinence was such an important issue that he dedicated an entire book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to its definition alone, although he argued strongly that it was a purely masculine vice, saying that incontinent men were ignorant and only acted

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[19] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe,' *Journal of Women's History*, 11.2 (1999) <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/journals/journal_of_womens_history/v011/11.2karras01.html> [accessed 11 July 2019] (para. 30 of 33).

[20] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 28. Prior to the Black Death in 1348, women (especially those who were poor bondswomen or peasants) could face fines for fornication under the concept of *leyrwite*, in which (predominately) unwed woman who engaged in fornication with men, could face fines of 4d to 6s 8d. Higher fines were imposed on women with multiple sexual partners, or those found fornicating with clerics, and evidence from Sutton from 1304 may suggest that these fines were sometimes imposed on brothels operating out of manors. 'Fornication' in this sense covered not just sexual contact, but also adultery, clerical concubinage and sex between married couples if this was believed to be overly amorous, and targeted couples with children who believed themselves to be married. This practice seems to have slowly died out after the Black Death, when concerns over unwed mothers and bastardy were less troubling because of the reduced population size. See E. D. Jones, 'The Medieval Leyrwite: A Historical Note on Female Fornication', *English Historical Review*, 107.2 (1992), 945-953 (pp. 948-951), and Judith M. Bennett, 'Writing Fornication: Medieval Leyrwite and its Historians', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2003), 131-162 (p. 135).

[21] Rossiaud states that 'procuresses' were women who recruited other women into prostitution. In Dijon, the procuresses recruited rape victims. See Rossiaud, p. 30.

[22] *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, ed. by H. E. Salter, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919- 1920), I (1920), pp.251-252. See chapter on Oxford below.

incontinently because despite knowing the act to be bad, passion and irrational thought encouraged the incontinent man to pursue pleasure.[23] Although he argued that 'no-one would apply the epithet [of incontinence] to women because of the passive part they play in copulation,' evidently medieval minds disagreed, seeing women as more lustful.[24]

Types of 'Illicit Sex' and how these were differentiated

Whilst casual sexual relationships and adultery in medieval European towns may have been seen as immoral, sexual sin was not seen as the worst of the vices. Dante's 'Inferno,' the first part of his poem *Divine Comedy*, demonstrates this point further. This fourteenth-century poem describes Dante's journey through hell, which is portrayed as nine circles of suffering located within the Earth. The sin of lust is dealt with in the second circle and therefore is seen as a relatively mild sin. Those condemned for lust are the first to be properly punished in hell, as they are blown back and forth by the terrible winds of a storm, without rest. Dante describes this as 'the infernal storm, eternal in its rage, [that] sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast: it whirls them, lashing them with punishment,' symbolizing the power of lust to blow the soul about aimlessly. [25] How, then, did local towns' authorities perceive different types of 'illicit sex'?

Paying for sex: brothels

Theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas encouraged the idea that without brothels, men would corrupt respectable women or resort to sodomy.[26] To explain this, he used the metaphor of a sewer, by suggesting that, like brothels, a sewer pit smelt bad but was necessary to keep a palace clean.[27] Therefore, some towns' authorities in continental Europe allowed prostitutes, or ran municipally owned brothels, to protect

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[23] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925) VII.1145b, lines 10-15.
[24] Ibid., VII.1148b lines 30-35.
[25] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume I: Inferno*, Canto V, trans. by Mark Musa (London: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 110.
[26] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England,' *Signs,* 14 (1989), 399-433 (p. 399).
[27] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Prostitution in Medieval Europe,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), pp. 243-260 (p. 245).

the morality of the town. In Dijon in the mid fifteenth century for example, brothels were introduced as preventative measures because the town had seen an increase in gang rape attacks.[28] Rossiaud concludes that there was a minimum of twenty public rapes annually in Dijon, 80% of which were gang rapes.[29]

Brundage suggests that the fifteenth century could be seen as the 'heyday' of municipally owned brothels on the continent, where brothels were licensed and provided an income for the towns' authorities, and were subject to strict regulations about where they could be located, who they could be run by, and how their women should behave and dress.[30] In renaissance Germany, the women's lives were still strictly controlled, and in Nuremberg there were even rules on how much wine the prostitutes and their customers were allowed to drink.[31] From the fifteenth century prostitutes were banned altogether from Augsburg.[32] Some rules protected the women, and men who assaulted the prostitutes could be put into prison.[33] In France, protective measures meant the women were not allowed to remain within the brothels at night.[34]

Goldberg argues that the 'necessary evil' argument put forward for brothels by Aquinas may not have been appropriate for England, as unlike on the continent, where brides were presumed to be virgins, in England marriages were often companionate and virginity was less highly valued. This could explain the lack of municipally owned brothels in medieval England, though small scale, regulated brothels seem to have occurred sporadically in areas such as Southampton.[35] In this thesis, brothels are shown to have occurred in specific areas, such as around King's Hall in Oxford. As Moore points out, the profitability of prostitution could be monopolised by the crown or municipal bodies through licensing the brothels and charging fees, although this did not necessarily prevent the women from being imprisoned or expelled.[36]

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[28] Ibid., pp. 243-260 (p. 246).
[29] Rossiaud, p. 12.
[30] J. A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 526.
[31] Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 98.
[32] Carole Rawcliffe and Claire Weeda, *Policing the Urban Environment in Premodern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), p. 263.
[33] Ibid., p. 101.
[34] B. Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 217.
[35] P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c.1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 153.
[36] Moore, p. 91.

In England, one of the few areas with 'official' brothels was Southwark, owned by the Bishop of Winchester. These licensed brothels, known as the 'Stews', because of the large amount of bath houses associated with prostitution there.[37] They resided in the Bankside area, which lay in the manor of the Bishop of Winchester. The Bishop of Winchester was not alone in renting tenements for the use of sex work however. In York, the Vicars Choral rented cheap tenements to prostitutes and in turn the clients of these prostitutes were often vicars.[38] The Bishop of Winchester had no personal role in the administration of the brothels, which were privately owned, although the stewmongers and prostitutes were subject to strict regulations.[39] By the end of the fifteenth century, Brundage estimates that there may have been around eighteen brothels in Southwark.[40] Whilst these were within legal jurisdiction, men could still be prosecuted for visiting them.[41]

As with prostitution, the definitions for brothel-keeping in England are often indistinct, and it is sometimes unclear if defendants were being accused of brothel-keeping or procuring. If they were being accused of brothel-keeping, this does not necessarily mean that they were running a brothel; instead the defendant may have been a pimp or procuress renting property used by prostitutes, such as taverns, inns and gaming houses.[42] Furthermore, contrary perhaps to modern day assumptions, the brothels themselves could be run by women, men and married couples, and brothel-keepers often had secondary occupations.[43] Like the prostitutes, procuresses were condemned by society, and were often depicted as depraved old women, much like witches.[44]

Outside Southwark, brothels were less regulated and unlike on the continent were often small and private.[45] Although regulated brothels appeared in Southwark, Sandwich and Southampton, institutionalised brothels were rare.[46] This may have been because stews and prostitutes were associated with diseases such as leprosy, and were seen in some English towns (such as Norwich) as a barrier to a town's moral and

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[37] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 527.
[38] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 151.
[39] Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 209-215.
[40] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 523.
[41] Karras, *The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England*, pp. 399-433 (p. 410).
[42] Ibid., pp. 399-433 (p. 406).
[43] Ibid., (p. 413).
[44] Karras, *Prostitution in Medieval Europe*, pp. 243-260 (p. 252). Procuresses acted as 'bawds' and go betweens, much like pimps but were women. Legislation against these women was often as harsh as those against prostitutes. See Geremek, pp. 234-239.
[45] Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes', p. 180.
[46] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 35.

physical health.[47] Whilst fines were imposed on brothels, these fines never appear to have been enough to actually close them. In Exeter, the civic authorities profited from fines imposed on brothels, and Karras' research suggests that in other towns fines were imposed so frequently that they merely represented a licensing fee. Town authorities studied in this thesis, such as the leet courts in Great Yarmouth, support her argument, and as will be seen, some towns further used these fines to make urban improvements such as mending the town walls.[48] Overall, the brothels that did appear in England were more common in larger towns but were rarely municipal, suggesting that most were set up by opportunistic people.

Paying for sex: Prostitution

Some women may have been forced into prostitution by brothel-keepers or male bosses and women living on the margins of society may have seen little financial alternative.[49] Hanawalt's research suggests that female servants could be at risk of being forced into sexual relationships by their male bosses, although some urban authorities used measures to protect servants and prevent servant sexual relationships. In Norwich in the 1450s for example, statutes prevented servants from being out after curfew. Regardless, the poorest girls were certainly at the highest risk of turning to prostitution. Whilst the work could give the women some financial support, it also exposed them to disease, violence and the fear of pregnancy. Medieval medical works argued that excessive sex could cause ill health and harm a woman's reproductive organs, which seemed to be reinforced by the sterility of prostitutes. Medieval medical writers argued that '[the prostitutes'] wombs no longer operated properly to receive seed or had become too smooth to retain the seed once it had entered.'[50] Karras argues that infertility in prostitutes could indicate high levels of venereal disease, although this could also indicate that prostitutes had other ways of preventing pregnancy, such as having non-vaginal sex, which may be reinforced by the account of John Rykener, a male transvestite prostitute working in London in the fourteenth century.[51]

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[47] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 150, and Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 104-111.
[48] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 150.
[49] Hanawalt, p. 11.
[50] Joan Cadden, 'Western Medicine and Natural Philosophy,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), pp. 51-81 (p. 66).
[51] Karras, *Prostitution in Medieval Europe*, pp. 243-260 (p. 253). In the account, Rykener's client explains that he believed Rykener to be a woman named 'Eleanor', which must indicate that the couple did not have vaginal sex. See Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, '"*Ut Cum Muliere*": A Male

Overall, female sex-workers often resorted to casual prostitution only for short periods of time, depending on the availability of other work.[52] Prostitution itself was not really seen as a 'trade' or 'job' and was normally opportunist- it took place almost anywhere (for example in a house, garden, tavern, church or behind a stall) and could be at any time of day, although European brothels could not stay open at night.[53] Mostly, women's economic contributions represented extensions of their roles as wives and mothers and most women's jobs involved domestic roles or providing food and cloth. Goldberg argues that prostitution was merely an extension of this, as again women were offering services a wife would normally provide.[54] The 1381 poll tax from Oxford shows that most of the women working there in the late fourteenth century were involved in domestic roles. Of the eighty-three women recorded, thirty-nine women were listed as being spinsters.[55] After this, the most common jobs were shepsters, brewers and hucksters, all female domestic roles.

Furthermore, women who engaged in prostitution would be seen by the community as immoral and dangerous to social order and marriage.[56] They were often forced to wear distinctive clothing and were forbidden from wearing luxurious and expensive items to distinguish them from respectable women. In Great Yarmouth and Bristol, prostitutes were forced to wear striped hoods.[57] In Germany, the women were required to wear a yellow band somewhere on their clothing and this included women who lived with priests publicly.[58] This was an attempt by ecclesiastical courts to control social order and prevent the sinful women from corrupting respectable folk.[59]

Karras argues that in England, the courts that recorded these crimes saw the women as sinners, not victims, and this was certainly the case for the towns studied in this thesis. Local governments were charged with the task of being responsible for prostitution within their own towns and this was why the term 'whore' had no standard meaning.[60] Different towns dealt with prostitutes differently. In London, the women may have had a hot rod placed in their hand, or been put in the pillory, before finally

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Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London,' in *Premodern Sexualities* ed. by L. Fradenburg & C. Feccero (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99-11.

[52] Hanawalt, p. 186.

[53] Ibid., p. 202.

[54] Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes', p. 177.

[55] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 94.

[56] Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 75.

[57] Goldberg, Pigs and Prostitutes', p. 174.

[58] Wiesner, p. 103.

[59] Karras, *The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England*, pp. 399-433 (p. 403).

[60] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 14.

having their hair cut off and being expelled, and likewise York decided to expel the women.[61] In Germany, punishments for these women were harsh for repeat offenders; the women could be beaten, banished, branded, or mutilated. One account of a woman in Nuremberg states that for repeat criminal offences of prostitution and theft, she was beaten, burnt through the cheeks, had her fingers cut off and finally was drowned.[62] The men were rarely punished, but could be questioned. Overall, there appears to have been little consistency between towns in England or on the continent, and the punishments discussed in this thesis where much less harsh, with fines, banishment and penance being most town's preferred methods of punishment. Punishment was also topographically specific, as acts of public humiliation were used to deter wrongdoing, and pillories were often placed in the marketplace.

Rossiaud argues that theologians drew a clear distinction between spiritual and carnal sin, as spiritual sin was seen as a graver offence against God, and this may explain why stories about prostitutes in theological accounts were not always damning.[63] For example, saints' lives may include stories about prostitutes repenting and offered the women hope. The strongest of these was certainly the story of Mary Magdalene, the most famous Christian woman depicted as a 'whore.' The Magdalene's transgression was seen to be strong sexuality, agreeing with medieval thinkers' belief that women were naturally more lustful than men.[64] This view had medical roots: a woman must be more lustful because of her cold and wet humours, whereas men were naturally dry and warm. Regardless of whether money ever exchanged hands, Magdalene was branded a prostitute by preachers and seen as a victim of her own extraordinarily female sexual appetite.[65] Rossiaud reinforces this by arguing that even if a woman was raped, she was still to blame for leading men to such debauchery through her lustfulness and beauty.[66] Despite this, Magdalene could be seen by women of similar circumstance as a powerful example of rehabilitation, as she had repented of her whoredom and successfully re-entered the Christian community, finally transcending her origins to become a saint. The ability to repent shows that medieval thinkers did not see prostitution as innate; a woman may have been innately lustful but she could free herself from sexual sin by repentance.

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[61] Ibid., pp. 15-18.
[62] Wiesner, p. 109.
[63] Rossiaud, p. 73.
[64] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of Mary Magdalene: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 34.
[65] Ibid., p. 170 and 173.
[66] Rossiaud, p. 81.

In England too, town authorities offered penance as a preferred method of punishment in the case of prostitutes and adulterers. Although prostitutes in Oxford could be banished, several towns such as Great Yarmouth used penance to punish women (as long as they were not repeat offenders) and save the town's moral health. Sometimes this penance was acted out publicly, as a way of deterring others from the sin of lust.[67]

Sometimes attempts were made to produce dowry money to allow prostitutes to marry, and houses of refuge organised like convents (referred to as Magdalene houses) on the continent took prostitutes in.[68] The women residing in these houses became known as the 'White Ladies' although there do not appear to have been any Magdalene houses for women in England.[69] However, in England, Mary Magdalene became the patron saint of leprosy (because of the popular belief that prostitution spread leprosy) and 'Mandalin Houses' appeared which were synonymous with leper hospitals.[70] In addition to producing dowry money and setting up hospitals, other attempts were made to help poor women. In the early thirteenth-century, Pope Innocent III reversed the policy that men could not marry prostitutes. He not only permitted but also encouraged these unions, and promised spiritual rewards for the men who 'saved' these women, providing that they could keep their wives sexually faithful and prevent them from ever returning to prostitution.[71] Some left money to provide dowries for poor women in their wills, which may have been aimed at prostitutes.[72]

Although authorities might tolerate prostitution, medieval views on bastardy were less liberal. There is very little evidence of what the prostitutes did if they became pregnant, although we can safely assume that bastardy was common. Women could be prosecuted for *childwite*, the act of bearing an illegitimate child. Illegitimate children might be sent to board with other families, which apparently became so common in Cranfield, Bedfordshire, that in the 1510s an order was passed stating that 'no one

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[67] For example see below chapter on Cambridge, especially pp. 70-71.
[68] Karras, *Prostitution in Medieval Europe*, pp. 243-260 (p. 254).
[69] J. A. Brundage, 'Sex and Canon Law,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), pp. 33-51 (p. 44).
[70] Jansen, p. 175.
[71] Brundage, 'Sex and Canon Law,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Bullough and Brundage, pp. 33-51 (p. 44). This may have been alluring to men from the poorer classes, as the prostitutes would bring a dowry with them, although this is unlikely to have been large.
[72] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 156.

should take in the child of a whore to be mothered or nursed' under pain of a 6s 8d fine.[73]

As birth mostly took place at home, provisions for childbirth in hospitals were only intended for prostitutes, the poor, or those who lacked home bases. In their research on medieval hospitals, Orme and Webster concluded that areas with a high migrant population, a large number of servants and prostitutes or higher rates of poverty, provide the best evidence for high numbers of female patients, such as London.[74] In Southwark, Mayor Richard Whittington endowed a postpartum confinement ward at St Thomas Hospital in 1423, so that women out of wedlock could give birth without fearing shame, and it was expected that the canons and nuns of the hospital would observe the confidentiality of the women.[75] Not all hospitals were as liberal. Although St John the Baptist Hospital in Oxford had a women's chamber from 1240, it excluded 'lascivious' pregnant women, presumably meaning unwed mothers.[76]

Clerical Sex

Although theologians may have conceded the need for prostitution and brothels, they certainly did not take a similar view of clerical sex, rape, incest or adultery. Even within marriage, theologians preached that sexual relationships were problematic because all coital relationships were tainted by lust, though married couples should also only abstain from sex for short periods of time in obedience to St Paul's teachings in the bible.[77]

Ecclesiastical authorities were also concerned with the morality of the clergy and laity in English towns. By the 1270s, bishops assigned to carry out visitations were instructed to ask parishioners how they found their clergy.[78] These visitations relied on 'trustworthy men' who represented their parishes and were of high economic standing

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[73] McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620*, p. 64.

[74] Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, *The English Hospital 1070- 1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 109-110.

[75] Hanawalt, p. 31.

[76] Eleanor Chance, et al, 'A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, The City of Oxford,' ed. by Alan Crossley and C. R. Elrington, in *British History Online* (1979) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22803> [accessed 11 July 2019], and Orme and Webster, p. 58. Poor pregnant women in Oxford may have given birth at St Peter in the East instead, which was specifically set up to help the poor. See A. Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford, Composed in 1661-6 by Anthony Wood*, ed. by A. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), p. 527.

[77] In I Corinthians 7.5. See also J. A. Brundage, 'Prostitution, Miscegenation and Sexual Purity in the First Crusade', in *Crusade and Settlement*, ed. by Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), pp. 57-65 (p. 57).

[78] Ian Forrest, 'The Transformation of Visitation in Thirteenth- Century England', *Past and Present*, 221 (2013), 3-38 (p. 13) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtt013>

within their towns and were mostly tenants in the upper half of peasant society. [79] They had invaluable local knowledge which the bishops needed in order to manage the clergy and discipline the laity. Ian Forrest argues that visitors wanted to uncover scandal amongst the clergy, although representatives reported not fact but 'widely-held public suspicion, or *fama*', which was the report of the locality, based on repeated declarations and suspicions by the 'good' men of the neighbourhood.[80] By the 1300s, visitation was being widely used as the vehicle for pastoral reform, and Forrest cites that one of their three main purposes was to regulate clerical sexual morality.[81]

It seems unlikely that all stories related to sexuality in the vast array of visitation records are false. Clerical sex, concubinage and involvement with prostitutes were not only reported in the visitations but in chronicles, oath books and in apostolic registers. As will be discussed further in the comparisons below, whilst theologians and ecclesiastics may have condemned these relationships, townsfolk may not have viewed them as abnormal or even 'wrong'. Rossiaud argues that clerical members made up 20% of prostitutes' clientele in Dijon, saying 'I doubt that priests' frequenting of prostitutes was seen as truly scandalous, at least not by the majority of the faithful.'[82] Rather, the community would be much more upset by a priest who kept a concubine, as society allowed unmarried men to fornicate, and clergymen were not held in such reverence that they were believed to abstain from any sexual activity entirely.[83]

This was certainly true of the Cathedral town of Lichfield. Lichfield attracted pilgrims and travellers, and had a large number of unmarried clergy. The dean's visitation in the 1460s revealed that twenty-seven women in the town were accused of prostitution. Thirty-eight children had been born out of wedlock between them and most of the suspected fathers were members of the clergy.[84] However, this was not necessarily entirely the result of prostitution and it is likely that some of these women and children would have acted as clergy members' families, simply without the ability to marry them. Popular literature was filled with sad stories about maidens seduced,

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[79] Ibid., pp. 15-18
[80] Ibid., p. 23
[81] Ibid., pp. 29-31
[82] Rossiaud, p. 41.
[83] Ibid., p. 42.
[84] A. J. Kettle, 'Ruined Maids: Prostitutes and Servant Girls in Later Medieval England,' in *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society*, ed. by R. R. Edwards & V. Ziegler (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 19-31 (p. 28).

impregnated and then abandoned by clerics.[85] This does not mean that some of the women were not prostitutes, however, and as Goldberg points out, most of the clergy would have had no family responsibilities and more disposable income than many other men in the towns.[86]

Overall, conclusions drawn from the towns studied in this thesis, agree that the clergy were often believed to be the clients of prostitutes. Regardless of 'town type', members of the church were time and again accused of sexual relationships with women in the towns. Furthermore, topographically *Grope Lanes*, were often located near religious houses, encouraging the idea that clerics engaged in prostitution.

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[85] See Sarah Annette McLoughlin, 'Gender and Transgression in the Late Medieval English Household' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2011), especially chapters 1 and 2 in which McLoughlin looks at a number of late English poems surrounding the theme of clerical seduction and pregnancy. Jeremy Goldberg, 'Girls Growing up in Later Medieval England- Jeremy Goldberg sifts through Contemporary Accounts of the Perils, Pleasures and Growing Pains for Young English Women in the Late Middle Ages,' *History Today*, 45.6 (1995), 25-33 (31). In Oxford, these clerics would have been both members of the clergy and students.
[86] Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes', p. 176.

1.UNIVERSITY TOWNS: OXFORD

In this chapter, I will analyse evidence of prostitution and illicit sex associated with Oxford, and later, in the next chapter, compare this information to another university town, Cambridge. Regulation in these towns was very different from those in other town types, as both were so heavily influenced by the power of the university, and were under the strict control of the university chancellor. In both Oxford and Cambridge, the university chancellors were seen as the guardians of morality, and were therefore given the authority to inquire into immoral behaviour; they could deprive students of their degrees, impose fines on clerks and laymen, could expel suspected immoral people from the town, and imprison or fine them, and they counted as ecclesiastical judges, so had the power to excommunicate.[87] This variation means that the records for these two towns are significantly more substantial than for the other case studies, and so I have decided to split discussion of them into separate chapters. Therefore, this chapter will look at illicit sex only in Oxford. Oxford had an important central market, with roads to London and the southern Midlands, was accessible via the Thames and often welcomed the royal court to Woodstock Palace. Overall, Oxford was reasonably prosperous in the fourteenth century, with a recorded 2,357 tax payers according to the 1377 Poll Tax. It therefore ranked sixteenth of the towns listed according to the poll assessment, and is the fourth largest of all the towns studied in this thesis.[88]

Was 'illicit sex' marginal in Oxford?

In medieval England, a street name could be an indication of the work being performed there. This was true of Oxford and several towns had road names that suggested sexual activity. In London for example, prostitution appears to have been

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[87] Alan B. Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c. 1500* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988), pp. 71-2.
[88] Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).

accepted on 'Cocks Lane.'[89] Whilst it may have been accepted, it was also regulated and in November 1393, *Letter Book H* records a proclamation forbidding night-walkers in the City and relegating women of bad repute to the Stews on the Thames and Cokkeslane.[90] As Geremek reveals in his work on medieval prostitution in Paris, the idea to name particular streets for prostitution may have been both as a mere recognition of the pre-existence of prostitutes in these areas and an attempt to regulate the problem.[91]

Like those in London, the prostitutes in Oxford may have been associated with one particular lane. *Gropecunt Lane* appears often in the records in the early thirteenth century, although the women do not appear to have been forced to reside here (which would have meant the authorities admitting their presence), as they were in Cokkeslane in London. Perhaps this was because the authorities in London felt a stronger urge to regulate professional prostitution than was felt in smaller towns with casual prostitution, such as Oxford. The cartulary of St Frideswide's Priory refers to it as *Crepecun Lane* in 1230. The cartulary of the hospital of St John the Baptist calls it *Gropekunt Lane* in 1258 and *Gropecunte Lane* in the 1290s, although it had become simply known as *Grope Lane* by the end of the century and has been referred to as *Magpie Lane* since the seventeenth century. [92] The lane was centrally located in the middle of the town, joining the high street opposite the university church of St. Mary the Virgin, though the lane itself can hardly have been pleasant, as the end of *Grope Lane* was apparently at the lowest part of the town, and presumably intersected with a large drain for the elimination of sewage and dirty water.[93] This association between sexual pollution and sewage was not coincidental, as shall be discussed further in the discussion on Norwich; authorities believed that both physical and moral health affected a town's cleanliness.[94]

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[89] The *Piers Plowman,* by William Langland, references 'Clarisse of Cokkes lone' in passus 5, saying that gluttony had set in. See *The vision of William concerning Piers Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, by William Langland*, ed. by W. W. Skeat (London: Trubner & Co.), p. 61.

[90] *Calendar of Letter-Books, Letter Book H circa A.D.1375-1399*, ed. by R.R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1900), p. 402.

[91] Prostitutes were also focused around the university. Geremek, p. 213.

[92] *The Cartulary of the Monastery of St Frideswide at Oxford: Vol I, General and City Charters,* ed. by S. R. Wigram, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), I, p. 392; *The Cartulary of the Hospital of St John the Baptist*, ed. by H. E. Salter, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), II, p. 101; *The Cartulary of the Hospital of St John the Baptist*, ed. by H. E. Salter, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), I, pp. 466-468.

[93] H. E. Salter, *Medieval Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1836), p. 86.

[94] See chapter on Norwich and Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 104-111.

Map of Oxford, c. 1375, showing the locations of illicit sex in fourteenth century Oxford. From Eleanor Chance, et al, 'A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, The City of Oxford,' ed. by Alan Crossley and C. R. Elrington, in *British History Online* (1979) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22803> [accessed 16 July 2019]

Map showing the plots surrounding Grope Lane, Oxford, drawn by H. E. Salter. From *Oriel College Records*, ed. by C. L. Shadwell & H. E. Salter (Oxford Clarendon, 1926), p. 112.
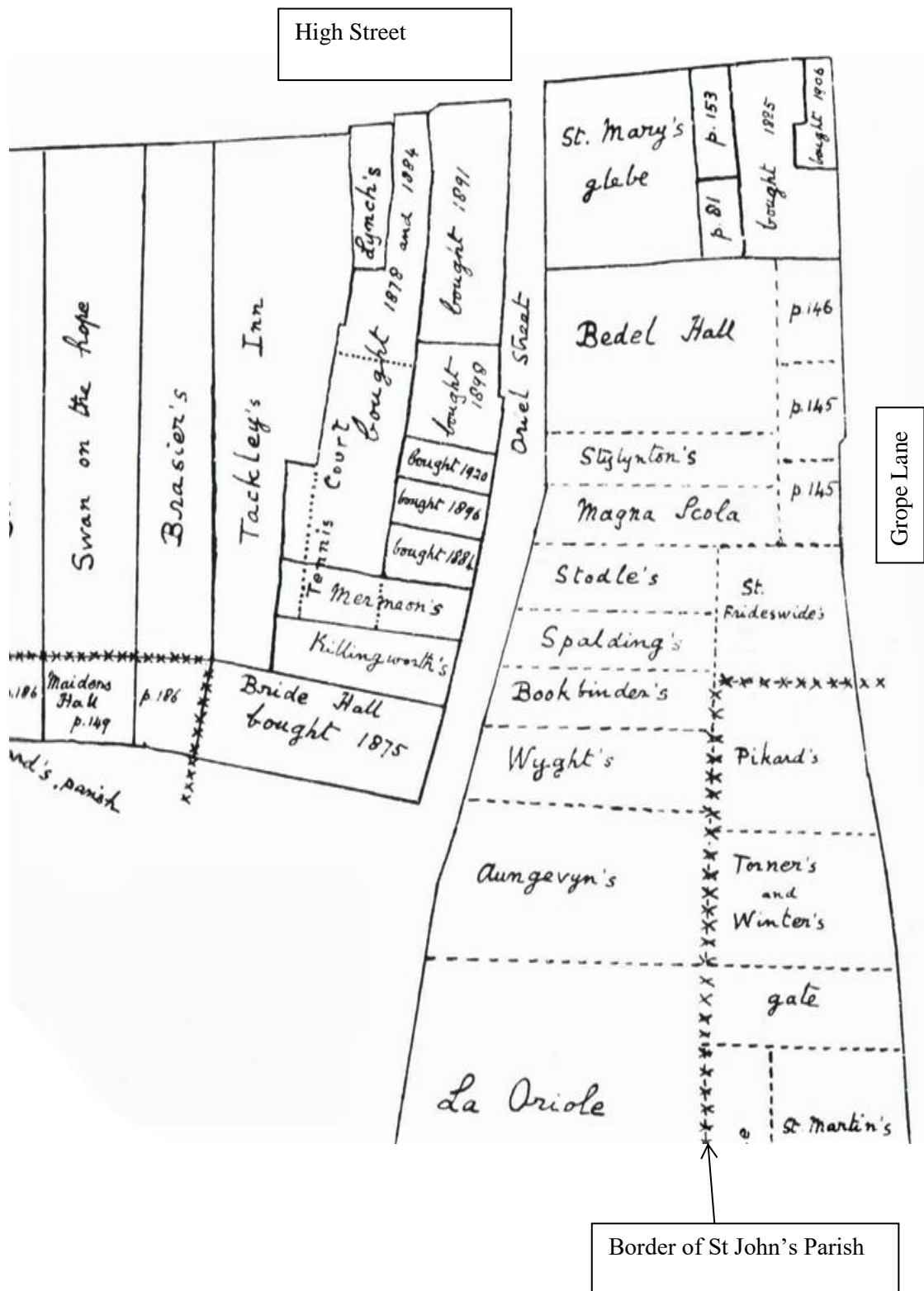
In the 1890s Herbert Hurst edited a dissertation about the antiquities of Oxford by Leonard Hutten written around 1625. He claimed that Hutten's survey indicated that there was a tavern called Magpie Inn on the lane around 1600, allegedly at 'the centre of the great carrier trade from Oxford to London,' which would have made it a hotspot for prostitution, although it does not appear in the records, and Hutten's survey has not survived, so it is not possible to verify whereabouts on the lane the inn was located.[95]

Another plan (shown above) of *Grope Lane* has been reproduced from the Oriel College Records and so an idea of what premises fronted the street is available. It seems that, there was possibly a garden on *Grope Lane* belonging to St Frideswide's Priory from around 1400, and in 1467 there was also an orchard on the lane given to Oriel College.[96] The cartulary of the hospital of St John the Baptist states that there was an orchard granted to Oriel College between the tenements of St Frideswide's and St Thomas' chantry.[97] According to Salter's *Map of Mediaeval Oxford* (shown below), there may have been a second garden between Lion Hall and Wormen Hall, which was conveyed to John de Osneye in 1431.[98] These open gardens could easily be used for casual prostitution by students, or as meeting places for young unwed couples.

Oxford's *Gropecunt Lane*, recorded in 1237, is so far the earliest example found, followed by London, where *Gropecunte Lane*, north of Cheapside was recorded in 1260.[99] In his research on medieval women's work, Jeremy Goldberg argues that these lanes were often near religious houses, which adds weight to the argument that in England the clergy were often the principal clients of prostitution.[100] Goldberg's argument rings true for Oxford, where *Gropecunt lane* was surrounded by All saint's, St Peter in the East and St Frideswide's priory, and was especially close to the university church of St Mary the Virgin.

[95] Herbert Hurst, *Oxford Topography: An Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), p. 186.
[96] *Oriel College Records*, ed. by C. L. Shadwell & H. E. Salter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 145.
[97] *The Cartulary of the Hospital of St John the Baptist*, I, p. 471.
[98] H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, ed. by W. A. Pantin, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1960), I, p. 202.
[99] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', pp. 206-210.
[100] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 153.

Salter's Map of Oxford, showing the plots surrounding Grope Lane in more detail, and demonstrating how non-marginal the street was. From H. E. Salter, *Map of Mediaeval Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934) Map 5.

Baker and Holt argue that these streets were centrally situated to offer indigenous urban men casual prostitution and cater for the illicit sexual demands of visitors to the markets, although in Oxford the demand would have been provided not only by visitors, but by the clergy and students, who were supposed to be celibate. Holt and Baker state that in addition to the surplus of men away from their wives, these market places would have brought women to the market too, and some of these may have engaged in casual prostitution to occasionally relieve themselves from poverty. For these outsiders, a clearly named nearby street (such as *Grope Lane*) would have been essential for them to find a place in which to engage in prostitution in an otherwise unknown town. [101]

In Oxford, it is likely that the name *Grope Lane* evolved over time. If the name of the street was formed by public reference, then all we can know for certain is that the street-name points towards presumably illicit sexual encounters, but not necessarily 'professional' prostitution. Instead, they may have acted as a dark lane for lovers, or for young unwed couples. Furthermore, the prostitutes in London were forced to reside in Cokkeslane, not *Gropecunt Lane*, which may indicate a lack of regular prostitution there, because the authorities seemingly felt no reason to validate the street as a red light area. Writing in the 1600s, Anthony Wood had an entirely different explanation as to how *Grope Lane* in Oxford got its name. He claimed that, far from being a hotbed of sexual activity, the street was owned by W. de Krop, known also as W. de Grope, who was famous for living there. Furthermore, he believed that the street had been known by many other names, such as *Winkin Lane*, *Argoes* and *Spur Lane*, although these do not appear elsewhere in the records, so it seems likely that he was incorrect about the origin of the lane's name.[102]

Apparently the area surrounding *Grope Lane* in Oxford had long been associated with prostitution. On 27 April 1299, the death of a woman named Margery de Hereford was reported to the local coroner.[103] She had died in a house in the parish of St Aldate's, of a wound that she had sustained next to her left breast, an inch wide and five inches deep. An inquest held the same day established that, on the previous Friday, Margery had sexual relations with an anonymous clerk, in the early evening near King's Hall.

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[101] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p.201 and p.213.

[102] A. Wood, *The Antient and Present State of the City of Oxford* (London: J. & F. Rivington, 1773), p. 105.

[103] Oxford, Oxford History Centre, P6/1L, 1297-1301 and *Oxford City Documents: Financial and Judicial, 1268-1665*, ed. by J. E. Thorold Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 154.

Upon asking for her fee from the man he became violent and stabbed her, of which injuries she died two days later. Prior to her death, she claimed that he took her 'to King's Hall, and there had sex with her carnally, and she asked for her wage from him, so he pulled out his knife and wounded her by [her] breast.'[104] The clerk ran away before he could be arrested. Violence was a problem for prostitutes, as the women could be beaten, stabbed and abused by their clients, although some courts did attempt to forbid attacks on these women, and the inquisition into Margery's death indicates that had the clerk been identified, he would have been put in jail.[105]

Although the church may have condemned prostitution, Margery was buried with full ecclesiastical rites. Interestingly, Salter barely records the account, stating only that a woman had been stabbed and mentions no sexual motive for the attack.[106] Perhaps, as will be discussed later, this is an indication of his moral prejudices. Remarkably, in a footnote, the area of the attack is described by Salter, as the subject of a complaint regarding its notoriety: 'King's Hall in Beaumont, around which location there were brothels so evidently that the Carmelites complained [about them] afterwards […] [which area] was called Brasenose.'[107] The problem is that, despite referring to brothels around King's Hall in Beaumont, the footnote goes on to identify the area with Brasenose, even though the two places were neither related nor near one another. If the statement actually refers to Beaumont Palace which was situated outside the northern gate and was the intended residence for the king during his stay in Oxford (near the Woodstock hunting lodge from the twelfth century), then there is no topographical connection with *Grope Lane*. However, if the brothels were around Brasenose College, once the site of King's Hall, then this would be clear evidence of prostitution in St Mary's parish, the location of *Grope Lane*.[108] Goldberg too argues that King's Hall was in the vicinity of a well-known red light district, which seems likely when we consider its position adjacent to St Mary the Virgin's church, and across the road from *Grope Lane*.[109]

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[104] *Oxford City Documents*, pp. 154-155.

[105] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 529.

[106] See *Records of Mediaeval Oxford: Coroner's Inquests, The Walls of Oxford, etc.*, ed. by H. E. Salter (Oxford: The Oxford Chronicle Company, 1912), p. 8.

[107] *Oxford City Documents*, p. 155.

[108] Jeaffreson argues that this area would have been abundant with students, as it was 'the centre of scholastic activity in Oxford.' See J. C. Jeaffreson, *Annals of Oxford*, 2 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1871), I, p. 77. His conclusions are validated by the fact that by Margery's death in 1299, there were three colleges in this area: University, Merton and Balliol.

[109] See P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women in England c. 1275- 1525, Documentary Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 213.

In his research on the university, Catto argues that from the thirteenth century it was actually Beaumont that was notorious for prostitution, but there may have additionally been 'unpoliced suburbs' such as St Clements which housed 'notorious stews'. He further argues that prostitution had become an established trade by 1297, and that by 1305 this had annoyed the Carmelite Friars who complained that the Ladies of St Clement's would cross the Cherwell to loiter beneath the town walls, although this accusation is not reported elsewhere in the records.[110]

The High Street, which *Grope Lane* joins at its northern end, reveals something about the prostitutes' clientele. Salter writes that in 1370, sellers of straw occupied the area from East Gate to Charlton's Inn (later the site of All Souls College) and during markets the road was entirely closed off.[111] The area was also busy outside of market times and between St Mary's Church and Carfax there were continuous shops. These would probably have been no larger than six to ten feet wide. By 1510, a total of forty-seven tailor shops alone were recorded in the area. The owner could either live above the shop or in a different dwelling and lodgers might rent a room above a shop by entrance through a back or side passage.[112] Furthermore, there was an inn called 'Tackley's Inn,' (see maps above) which was acquired by Adam de Brome, the founder of Oriel College in 1324. By 1363, the cellar of the inn had become a tavern and this it appears to have remained throughout the fifteenth century, although by 1549 the inn had split into two parts, the east part becoming Tackley's Tavern and the west part becoming Buckley Hall.[113] There were two other inns in St Mary's Parish, Tingewick's Inn and Charleton's Inn.[114] These may have been used by the prostitutes, as taverns and inns were often hot-spots for prostitution because they sold alcohol, lured travelling men and provided opportunities for pimps (who sometimes had an intimate or even family relationship with the women), that would go unnoticed and therefore unregulated.[115]

Overall, *Grope Lane* in Oxford was neither in the suburbs nor marginal; instead the area surrounding *Grope Lane* was definitely a busy one, with many rented rooms,

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[110] J. I. Catto, 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters,' in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume I: The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. by T. H. Aston & J. L. Catto (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 151-193 (p. 162 and 184).
[111] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 77.
[112] Ibid., pp. 81-83.
[113] *Oriel College Records*, pp. 163-164.
[114] H. E. Salter, *Map of Medieval Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), map 3, and see Wood, *The Antient and Present State of the City of Oxford*, p. 73.
[115] Hanawalt, p. 202, and Geremek, p. 229.

shops and passing trade. It seems likely that women engaging in prostitution would have set up here to capitalise on this, and this indicates that the women's customers were often men who came to the High Street to shop or sell.

Celibate Clerics? Indications about Customers

The churches of Oxford were numerous, making their parishes small.[116] *Grope Lane* was between the parishes of St Mary the Virgin and St John the Baptist, which by 1292 had been given to Merton College.[117] If the clerics of the surrounding churches were frequenting prostitutes, it was certainly against ecclesiastical decrees. Canons number fourteen, fifteen and sixteen of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, stated that clergymen should not visit taverns, should live chastely and virtuously and would be suspended from office if they did not abstain from drunkenness. This did not mean that the clergy were chaste, however, and as Karras argues, areas with a large number of unmarried clergy would have produced a higher demand for prostitution.[118]

A visitation of St Frideswide's Priory in Oxford by the bishop of Lincoln, Richard Fleming, in January 1423, shows that there were some concerns about women being inside the priory. The priory was located in the southern part of the town, directly south of *Grope Lane*. In February 1420, William Chichele (the Chancellor of Salisbury), and John Wendelyburg were commissioned to visit Oxford to 'inquire and correct faults', and had the power to withhold benefices and hear causes.[119] Their reports clearly concerned Fleming and in 1432, he sent a lengthy injunction to St Frideswide's stating its faults and behaviour that needed attention. The injunction stated that:

> henceforth no strangers or secular folk be lodged in your infirmary[…] Also that no women, especially those of ill and unhonest report, be allowed, so far as in you lies, to enter within the enclosure of your monastery, and that you suffer no woman, however honest she be, so to enter without honest company, nor in any wise to abide therein for any length of time[…] Also that no-one of you speak with any women without licence of his superior[…] nor take upon

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[116] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 119.
[117] Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford*, p. 71.
[118] Karras, *Prostitution in Medieval Europe*, pp. 243-260 (p. 248).
[119] *The Register of Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln, 1420-1431*, ed. by N. H. Bennet, 2 vols (Lincoln: Canterbury and York Society, 1094), I, p. 1.

himself to speak or communicate in public or private [with any] without a fellow canon of ripe discretion and mature age to hear them.[120]

These were admonished under the pain of excommunication. Specifically mentioning women of 'ill and un-honest report' in this way seems to be an indication that prostitutes were frequenting the priory. It is possible that these 'un-honest' women included women who were not prostitutes and in a second visitation held in June 1445 by William Alnwick, one of the brothers complained that the prior's sister, along with her two daughters, had moved into the priory and been living there for at least one year. Furthermore he claimed that the prior did not sleep in the priory at night. This may indicate that he had his own 'wife' and family in Oxford and the 'unhonest' women in the priory in 1432 may have been residents' relatives.[121]

In addition to this the Franciscans, or 'Grey Friars', were accused of spending time with women. The friary was located in the south-west of the town, inside the town walls. In 1533, Arthur of the Grey Friars was accused in court of having carnal relations with a woman in All Hallows parish, although it is unclear if she was a prostitute or partner. In 1535 the friars were again accused by the scholars of having children and taking wives.[122] In his research on the Grey Friars of Oxford, Andrew Little also found that the scholars further accused the friars of sodomy and taking wives in the 1380s, although the accusations of the university scholars against the Grey Friars may have been influenced by Wycliffite teachings. The situation between the University and the friars grew so tense that, in 1382, they were forced to write to John of Gaunt asking for his protection.[123]

It was not just the male clerics engaging in illicit sex, however. Godstow's nunnery is somewhat notorious in the visitations because of the stories concerning illicit sex and pregnancy. The nunnery was outside the town walls in the suburb of Godstow, about two and a half miles north of the town. During his visitation to the nunnery between 1432 and 1434, William Gray heard reports that the nuns were acting immorally. He responded that no nun should hold conference with any secular person, apparently because the students had said that 'they can have all manner of recreation with the nuns, even as they will desire.' The visitation further found that the nuns often

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[120] *VDL*, I, pp. 96-97.
[121] *VDL*, III, p. 266.
[122] A. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 94-5.
[123] Ibid., pp. 83-4.

went into the town, and Gray declared that the 'recourse of scholars' entering the nunnery should be restrained, alongside deciding that:

> Neither the gatekeeper of the monastery nor any other secular person convey any gifts, rewards, letters or tokens from the nuns to any scholars of Oxford or other secular person whomsoever, or bring back any from such scholars or persons to the same nuns[...] [or] she shall undergo imprisonment for a year.[124]

Apparently this threat was unsuccessful, as the nuns were found to be the recipients of presents again during Alnwick's visitation in 1445, and once again the Abbess Elizabeth Felmersham complained that it was impossible to keep the scholars out of the monastery and cloister. Another nun, Alice Henley, also said that Hugh Sadler, a chaplain, visited Sister Alice Longspree, claiming that he was a relative, and used the pretence to converse suspiciously with her. A second nun corroborated this accusation, saying that Sister Longspree 'used to hold parley after an exceedingly suspicious fashion in the church of the convent with Sir Hugh Sadylere, priest, despite the prohibition of the abbess, for the which there was enjoined upon her the penance of imprisonment…and to keep to the frater and cloister for a year.' Despite this punishment by the abbess, Alnwick further instructed that Felmersham should suffer no secular persons to have any access to the nuns, under the pain of excommunication.[125]

In all cases, Fleming, Gray and Alnwick were presented with the problem of unchastity amongst the canons and monks. Accusations centred around 'un-honest' and ill-famed women, possibly prostitutes, but also around the issue of adultery with married women in the towns. Historians may debate the extent of truth in these visitations, as defamation may have been intended, although it is clear that illicit sexual activity was not an uncommon accusation in these institutions. Christian Knudsen studied the Lincoln and Norwich visitations and calculated that, between 1430 and 1530, there were one hundred and eleven accusations of sexual misconduct in the visitations.[126]

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[124] *VDL*, I, pp. 67-8.

[125] *VDL*, III, pp. 114-5. Strangely, the nuns of Godstow Abbey pop up in a separate injunction- Alnwick's visitation of Eynsham Abbey, in which it was reported that a monk who had been imprisoned for bad behaviour in the abbey broke free and went into the apostasy, 'taking with him a nun of Godstow'. See p. 91. Eynsham abbey has not been discussed here as it is sited outside of Oxford, although the monks and Abbot were also accused of fornication and adultery. See *VDL*, I, pp. 55-63.

[126] Christian Knudsen, *Naughty Nuns and Promiscuous Monks: Monastic Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval England* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), pp. 102-3.

Knudsen's research implies that although sexual misconduct was considered a sin, 'it was very much de-emphasized compared to other disciplinary issues… time and time again, the bishops… emphasized economic and leadership issues over problems with chastity.'[127] However, in Oxford, nuns and clerics alike were threatened with imprisonment and excommunication, which shows that chastity was certainly taken seriously. Either way, it is evident that not all the clergymen were celibate, and for unchaste or promiscuous clergymen from St Frideswide's priory, St Mary the Virgin's parish or St John's parish, the nearby *Grope Lane* would have been easily accessible.

Evidence that indicates the students engaged in illicit sex

As a large student population resided in Oxford, it seems pertinent to question if there is evidence that they engaged in illicit sex, and if so, where? Like the clergy, the undergraduates of the university were supposed to be celibate, especially as some were in minor orders. Whilst studying for their degrees, students were expected to dedicate themselves to study entirely. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the university students are presented as happy but sober types, saying they 'looked howle, and therto sobrely… For hym was levere have at his beddes heed Twenty books, clad in blak or reed, of Aristotle and his philosophie.'[128] Like the students of Oriel College and Merton College, the clerk was expected to study theology alongside philosophy.

The map above, depicting Oxford from 1375, shows that there were three Oxford colleges surrounding *Grope Lane*: Oriel College, Merton College and Canterbury College. By 1437, Henry Chichele, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had also begun work on All Souls College.[129] As there were several colleges around *Grope Lane* by the fourteenth century, non-celibate students could easily have engaged in prostitution. Merton and Oriel College were founded by members of the Church, and their students mostly studied logic, philosophy and theology.[130] The students were not necessarily young boys; mature commoners could take postgraduate courses, though

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[127] Knudsen, pp. 225-6.

[128] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: The First Fragment*, ed. by M. Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 19.

[129] *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414- 1443, Volume I*, ed. by E. F. Jacob, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), I (1943), liii.

[130] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 95: Merton was founded by a bishop and Oriel was founded by Adam de Brome, an almoner to King Edward II. See Hurst, p. 178.

they were not obliged to take priestly orders. The younger students would probably have remained in Oxford during vacation periods such as Christmas. Overall, the number of students in these colleges remained very small and most students were expected to live in halls which would have been very similar to domestic houses.[131] Cobban says that these halls were usually purpose-built middle-sized town houses and would have been owned by individual landlords. They had a large hall for meals, seminars, and for social occasions, and a number of chambers housing between two and four students, with probably between ten and thirty students in each hall altogether. As there were approximately on average seventy halls during the first half of the fifteenth century, this would have provided housing for around one thousand students. The majority of these students resided in the eastern part of the town around St Mary the Virgin's Church, the location of *Grope Lane*. With such a dense student population living in such close proximity to an area known for prostitution, and with chambers and social halls within such nearby reach, it is easy to draw the conclusion that these students would have been the main clients of prostitutes, supposedly celibate or not.[132]

Although there was a large student population living within the town, there were attempts to prevent the students getting up to mischief and they were not allowed to rent private rooms outside of the halls in the town until the 1420s.[133] Although they were forbidden from doing so, it continued to happen and was a point of conflict for the colleges. In 1401, Archbishop Arundel complained that the fellows of Merton College had taken to lay professions, married women in the town and succumbed to Wycliffite views.[134] Furthermore, he said some had lived in Oxford for thirty or more years and still had not obtained a degree.[135]

Frustratingly, research about the students' lives is hindered by the fact that the rolls of the mayor's court and the chamberlain's rolls were lost soon after the civil war.[136] Despite this, the registers for Oriel and Merton remain, and some town records have survived. The Oriel College records indicate that the college had a passageway

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[131] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, pp. 102-6.

[132] Despite increased building, the student population declined after the Black Death in 1348, dropping from around 1500 in the early 1300s to around 1200 by 1440. A. B. Cobban, 'Colleges and Halls, 1380-1500,' in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume II: Late Medieval Oxford*, ed. by J. L. Catto & R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 581-635 (pp. 626-8).

[133] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 105.

[134] Ibid., p. 111. Wycliffism appears to have disappeared from Oxford by the 1420s.

[135] *Memorials of Merton College with Biographical Notices of the Wardens and Fellows*, ed. by G. C. Brodrick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 27.

[136] Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 40.

with a gate directly from it to *Grope Lane*.[137] As early as 1247, statutes of Merton College banned scholars from admitting strangers (including prostitutes) or even 'near relatives' into the houses, and scholars were required to abstain from noise within their chambers and apply themselves diligently to study.[138] Women were not allowed to attend the university, nor stay in the premises as they were believed (not without justification) to lure the students away from their learning.[139] If these rules were broken, students could be expelled, or have their financial support withdrawn, and in the case of adultery, they would immediately be ejected from the college. If this happened, they could not be readmitted unless they brought forth 'fruits worthy of repentance.' Furthermore the students were enjoined never to take meals in the town centre, nor enter the centre alone, and they had to return before nightfall.[140]

These statutes would have had little impact in reality, and in terms of topography it seems highly likely that many of the clients of the prostitutes in Oxford were students. In late medieval Paris, prostitutes were commonly found in the university district of Rue Fromental.[141] Like those of Paris, the Oxford students would have been entirely male, living away from home and with the opportunity to engage with prostitutes.

Karras agrees that in both Oxford and Cambridge the students would have engaged with prostitutes, and in 1461, Oxford attempted to deal with this problem by authorizing the Chancellor of Oxford to banish 'whores,' 'bawds' and 'incontinent women' from within a ten mile circumference of the colleges. Karras argues that this division between 'incontinent women' and 'whores' may have been an indication that there was a distinction between professional and unprofessional sex workers.[142] The writ authorizing the chancellor has been printed in the *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, and on 3 July 1461, letters patent states that the king hereby gives the university chancellor the power to clean the streets and banish women:

> [To] the Chancellor of the aforesaid University, we have granted the authority and the power to banish [women] from the said University for ten miles, [including] prostitutes and incontinent women from within the same university […] precinct[…] so that this kind of woman be banned from within ten miles of the University of Oxford[…] and if any one of them reside within

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[137] *Oriel College Records*, p. 142.
[138] *Memorials of Merton College*, pp. 322-3.
[139] *Annals of Oxford*, I, pp. 269-270.
[140] *Memorials of Merton College*, p. 26 and pp. 322-327.
[141] Geremek, p. 89
[142] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 19.

> ten miles of [the university], that the owner of that place or dwelling[…] or the deputy, upon notification of such [previous] banishment [from the] Chancellor [of the] said university, from the time [the banished women] had been [found within the university precinct] be imprisoned, and after the imprisonment that the Chancellor expel her [from Oxford].[143]

Whilst this writ finally gave the Chancellor the power to banish prostitutes officially, in reality he may have already been doing so. Either way, this certainly encourages the idea that the students were engaging in illicit sex.[144]

Findings of the inquisitions and their punishments

If the authorities, university chancellor and church were all condemning illicit sex, what punishments did they use to reprimand and deter? Illicit sex in Oxford appears in the records associated with students, prostitutes and religious houses, although legal and ecclesiastical courts continued to condemn it. In Oxford, there was a county gaol from at least the 1220s. As early as 1305, a writ was sent to Oxford requiring the chancellor to build two separate prisons so as to divide the sexes.[145] By 1310, a separate prison was provided for prostitutes in the west gate of the tower, which later took the nickname 'le mayden's chamber.'[146] The *Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie* states that in 1310 the chamberlain's accounts included an item for the building of a new part in the north area just for 'public' women, presumably referring to prostitutes. The women's chamber was then cleaned in 1317 and repaired between 1325 and 1326.[147] The chamber seems to have become disused by 1393, presumably because new accommodation elsewhere had been built. Hurst claims that, in his dissertation, Hutten noted that the City Book of Chamberlain's Expenses stated that the prison was repaired

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[143] *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, I, pp.251-252. Apparently this was not successful and as late as 1825 parliament was forced to issue acts allowing the chancellor to banish prostitutes. See *Enactments in Parliament, Specially Concerning the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, The Colleges and Halls Therein and the Colleges of Winchester, Eton and West Winsted: Vol II, George I- George IV*, ed. by L. L. Shadwell, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), pp. 395-396.

[144] In 1824 this charter was copied out with reference to the fact that it was unclear how long this practice had been going on. The editor noted that prostitutes in Oxford had 'always, it is believed' been approached by the proctors, in an attempt to suggest that the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which would change these powers, should not prevent the university chancellors from 'watching and warding' the city. See *Prostitution: Case and opinion on imprisonment and banishment, 1824*, manuscript available in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room, *OWL*, NW/4/8 (lower archive room).

[145] *Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie*, ed. by H. E. Salter (Oxford: George Simpson, 1920), p. 5.

[146] Chance et al., *A History of the County of Oxford*, pp. 331-336.

[147] *Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie*, pp. 257-262.

in 1358 and a 'house for whores' was built, although he does not say where.[148] By 1391, the prison had become known as the *Bocardo*, which may have come from the word *Boggard* meaning 'privy', due to its unsanitary conditions.[149] Imprisonment was not the only punishment for prostitutes however, as they could be fined, branded, exiled or put in the pillory. Additionally, it may be the case that not everyone in positions of authority agreed to imprison the women. In December 1307, the constable of Oxford Castle prison, Richard atte Hawe, was himself released from prison after three years for supposedly allowing a young woman named Alice free against the king's justice's orders. Hawe had served a three year sentence for allowing 'Alice la Dreys to depart from prison… of the said castle until she was delivered of child, she having been convicted of felony.'[150] This encourages the idea that noted locals may not agree with harsh punishment, and this attitude likely extended to girls thought to be soliciting, too.

The chancellor was also granted the right to impose fines or punishments on the women caught. The chancellor had extensive jurisdiction in the town, as he bound bailiffs and mayors to arrest offenders, and in 1441, the chancellor William Gray led an inquisition with delegates and judges in the church of St Peter in the East (in the north eastern part of the town, north of the High Street) into 'people of suspect character' whereby he accused several women of keeping 'lose' houses.[151] The inquisition discovered that nine women (named Agnes Barber, Catherine Yate, Isabella Baw, Christina Baw, her daughter, Margaret Michell, Johanna Begister of Bocardo, Agnes Wootton, Margaret Anasta, and Marjory Snow), had been 'living badly of their bodies,' indicating that they were prostitutes. Unfortunately, it is not clear what streets these women lived on, although they appear to have come from the parishes of St Peter in the East and St Clément's.[152] The poll tax for Oxford in 1377 showed that St Peter in the East was a surprisingly small parish, with only seventy-three households against the one hundred and twenty-three households in St Mary's parish.[153] As such, it encourages the idea that St Peter in the East was a reasonably poor parish. Additionally, it seems likely that at least one of these women was banished by the chancellor. On 28 February 1452,

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[148] Hurst, p. 186.
[149] Chance et al., *A History of the County of Oxford*, pp. 331-336.
[150] *Cal CR, Edward II, A.D. 1307-1313* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1892), p. 15.
[151] T. G. Jackson, *The Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), pp. 10-11. Jackson states that these women were banished, although this is not apparent from the record.
[152] *Munimenta Academica, or Documents Illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford, Part II*, ed. by Henry Anstey (London: Longmans, Green, reader and Dyer, 1868), p. 580. The document also names a man, Mauritius Kariore alongside these women, who presumably was either acting as a pimp, or himself engaged in a sexual relationship with these women.
[153] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 306.

Marjory Snow, almost certainly the same woman accused of prostitution in 1441, was banished from Oxford for acting violently and breaking the roof tiles in the bocardo.[154]

Like Margery de Hereford, Agnes Wootton's surname may suggest where she originated from. Goldberg argues that some women migrated from smaller villages to towns, under the allure of employment prospects, but then turned to prostitution when the reality of a lack of stable employment loomed.[155] This could have been the case for Agnes, as Wootton village is merely six miles from the centre of Oxford. Rossiaud argues that against popular literature of the time, prostitution was rarely the world of foreigners or vagabonds, which would encourage the idea that Agnes was a prostitute. Instead, the women involved were often from the surrounding area or town itself.[156] Place-inspired surnames appear to have been common amongst prostitutes, as in Winchester a number of the prostitutes seem to have been given the surname 'Scott,' showing that they were northern migrants.[157] Given this, it seems likely that Johanna Begister of Bocardo's surname was simply a reference to her having spent time in the town prison. The women losing their real surnames may have simply been another way that they were marginalised by society, and even Mary Magdalene's name was changed to *peccatrix* (female sinner) in Luke 7:36.[158] Interestingly, four of the women were also accused of being 'intolerable scolds,' the inclusion of which indicates that this was also seen as a purely feminine vice.[159]

As Margery de Hereford's case illuminates, in St Mary's parish in Oxford, brothels, or *Lupanaria*, were complained about as early as 1299, although there is no later evidence of any action being taken to prevent them.[160] It is likely that any brothels that did occur, for example those found in St Peter in the East, in the northern-eastern part of the town, north of the High Street, were seen to be for the benefit of the students. Additionally, unlike the continent, any 'brothels' that arose in Oxford were not municipally owned. Instead, they were more like small private houses in which women lived together, perhaps with one woman acting as a bawd. This does not mean that Oxford's brothels had nothing in common with brothels on the continent, however, as some small scale brothels in Europe may have been run by 'strumpets,' ex-prostitutes

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[154] *Munimenta Academica*, p. 659.
[155] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 302.
[156] Rossiaud, p. 32.
[157] Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 152.
[158] Jansen, p. 171.
[159] *Munimenta Academica*, pp. 580-581.
[160] *Oxford City Documents*, p. 155.

who housed in bordellos.[161] The inquisition conducted by Gray in 1441 showed that three of the women appear to have kept brothels, as Joanna Walish, Margaret Anasta and Alice Smith were all accused of having 'women living badly of the body' in their houses.[162] This may be an indication of small, private brothels, or of women acting as procuresses and providing places for illicit sexual activity to take place.

Inquisitions by the university chancellors were common throughout the 1440s, and Thomas Gascoigne (who was a theology professor at the university) held further visitations between 1443 and 1444, which are recorded in the *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434- 1469*. Women found to be misbehaving in any way could be held to account; as in the case of Christina from St Martin's parish, in the western part of the town, in March 1443. Christina lost her job as a university washerwoman for keeping the company of evil suspect persons. Inquisitions from March 1443 to 1444, uncovered further cases of illicit sexual activity in Gascoigne's jurisdiction. In the worst cases, this could result in banishment of the women. Lucy Colbrand was accused of being a prostitute who frequently procured in the university precinct. The inquisition found that she had committed fornication, been present at a murder, and caused many disturbances of the peace despite having previously been incarcerated. As such, she was banished from the town and given three days to leave under the penalty again of incarceration.[163] Although the chancellor's jurisdiction was predominately the university precinct, it is clear that banishment could be geographically further than this, as Johanna Furlang found in April 1444, when she abjured from prostitution and procuration but was still forced to swear never to reside in Oxford, within three miles of Oxford, or to reside in Abingdon. Letys Dylwyn too abjured, and was told not to reside within three miles of Oxford, whilst Anne Medun, who was accused of being a procuress, abjured but was simply noted to have withdrawn from Oxford.[164]

Others were allowed to only abjure. Between March 1443 and April 1444, Katerina Hasley (nee Ludow) of St Aldates parish in the southern part of the town, and Ienet Stafford both abjured prostitution and procurement. Agnes Russell was allowed to abjure her procurement and prostitution, under the threat that if she broke this she would have to go before the chancellor for further punishment. John Raney, a scholar from St

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[161] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 521.
[162] *Munimenta Academica*, pp. 580-581.
[163] *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469 Vol I*, ed. by H.E. Salter, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 92-3.
[164] Ibid., pp. 96-8.

Albans, too abjured from interacting with prostitutes and pimps, and promised to keep the peace.[165]

For those where banishment was seen to be too harsh, but abjuration was not possible, imprisonment and fines could be used as forms of punishment, as with Thomas Emerton and his wife Agnes in 1443. Thomas was forced to pay a forty shilling fine for his wife Agnes who was incarcerated, and promised Gascoigne that there would be no further immorality or concubinage. Other women found to be disturbers of the peace, because of their 'crimina enormia' or because they were prostitutes, faced incarceration too, although if they refused to abjure the penalty would be banishment.[166] The scribe of the *Registrum* notes the names of two women in 1443 who agreed to abjure to avoid imprisonment, Margaret Forstar and Margaret Gundal, both listed as wives, are noted as abjuring from procuration and prostitution.[167] Interestingly, the chancellor also seems to have imprisoned Hugo Blakton in 1444, a rector from Swords in Ireland, in the bocardo, for disturbing the peace and associating with prostitutes. He was told to abjure under the penalty of a forty shilling fine, to be paid to the university if ever he disturbed the peace, or interacted with pimps and prostitutes. Guarantors could be named as assurances for fines, perhaps if the perpetrator seemed unlikely to be able to pay the full amount, or to use as character references in the perpetrator's defence. Cristofori Barbur, on trial for known interaction with prostitutes and pimps and for disturbing the peace had two guarantors, George Scidmore and William Wulse, both of whom were listed as tailors.[168]

In some cases in April 1444, no formal punishment was handed down if the accused promised never to be involved with prostitution or procuration again. John Morys, who was noted as a tailor (but may well have been working as a pimp), was allowed only to swear never to be involved in procuration or prostitution under the penalty of a forty shilling fine, but no further punishment was made.[169] Lewis Ydern, a scholar, too avoided punishment, by swearing to serve the peace and not 'befriend prostitutes and pimps.' William Herman also avoided punishment by swearing not to befriend prostitutes, and another scholar, Richard May, also avoided punishment by promising to serve the peace and neither befriend nor 'use' prostitutes, showing that the

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[165] Ibid., p. 93 and p. 98-9.
[166] Ibid., p. 94.
[167] Ibid., p. 96.
[168] Ibid., pp. 98-9.
[169] Ibid., p. 97.

inquisitors were certainly aware that he had done so previously. This promise was reiterated later to add that Richard had sworn to serve the king's peace and neither 'nourish' pimps, nor use prostitutes, under the pain of a hundred shilling fine. [170] Punishment was also avoided by women, Margaret Bath promised not to befriend pimps or prostitutes and Johanna Prentis, wife of John, swore to serve the peace and not frequent prostitutes or pimps, suggesting that she may have been acting as a procuress.[171]

Overall, the inquisition led by Gascoigne between March 1443 and April 1444 questioned twenty-one people associated with various forms of illicit sex. Of these, eight were women thought to be acting as prostitutes, one was a woman accused of procuring alone, seven were men involved with prostitutes, two were women involved with prostitutes, one was a woman who associated with evil doers and two were married couples seen to be acting immorally. By far the most common punishment enforced by Gascoigne was that of 'abjuration', which came from the Latin meaning 'to forswear' and meant that those accused had to renounce whatever they were accused of. Eight of the accused abjured, five swore to not associate with prostitutes but received no formal punishment, three were banished, two were fined, two were imprisoned and one lost her job as a washerwoman. Of those fined, the preferred amount by Gascoigne seems to have been forty shillings, with one hundred being used in extreme or notorious cases, and the money was either paid directly to the university or to the crown. Topographically, Catto argues that this inquisition uncovered evidence of widespread prostitution in the district of Beaumont, arguing that the centre for prostitution was 'evidently in the Beaumont district from the late thirteenth century' and that it was 'so well organised and protected by 1444… that the townsmen, it was said, did not dare to state the facts when prostitutes came up before the Chancellor's court for fear of death or mutilation'.[172] I have been unable to decipher why Catto believes this area was in Beaumont specifically, as the *Registrum* inquisitions suggest that the women were found to be soliciting around the university precinct, and came from St Martin's, St Aldate's, St Mary's and St Peter in the East. Although the latter is less than a ten minute walk away from Beaumont Street, it seems that prostitution in Oxford was more widespread than this. Cobban agrees that the move to drive prostitutes out of the town

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[170] Ibid., p. 98.
[171] Ibid., p. 93 and p. 98.
[172] Catto, 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters,' in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume I: The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. by Aston and Catto, p. 162.

by Gascoigne revealed that there existed 'an organized network of prostitution on some scale.'[173] However, although Catto may be right that many of these women came from the northern parishes, such as St Peter in the East, the inquisitions also questioned townsfolk from St Martin's to the west and St Aldate's to the South.

Inquisitions were likewise held by Gilbert Kymer in 1446. Margaret Curteys appears twice in the *Registrum*. Initially on the 25 July 1446, Kymer convicted her of enticement and prostitution and forced her to leave Oxford for one year 'unless otherwise dispensed by the Lord Chancellor.'[174] However Curteys returned to the town (assuming she ever left) and resumed her illicit ways. On the 16 June 1453, the next chancellor, George Neville, sentenced her to the pillory and then banished her from Oxford under threat of the talion for prolonged prostitution, because there was no confidence she would stop:

> On account of the enormity, notoriousness and prolonged prostitution, [because] there was a presumption that she will not cease from committing such dreadful sins by Professor Thomas Saundrees, sacred canon [and] master George Neville, Chancellor of our University of Oxford[…] for [her] manifest sins[…] the commissioners have had to surrender [her to] the pillory, and the commissioners present eliminated [her] from the University before the Wednesday then next following, and [ordered] that she never return to the aforementioned University under [the] penalty of the talion.[175]

Overall, repeat offenders seem to have been a common problem. Kymer also convicted Margareta Gryme for prostitution on the 1 August 1446, and banished her from the town for three years: 'Margaret Gryme is convicted of prostitution [and] has been abjured from the village [of Banbury, just outside Oxford] and precinct of the University at St Peter in Chains, in the year as above, [for the next three years], unless otherwise she herself is dispensed by the lord chancellor.'[176]

Finally, on 11 August 1466, Neville questioned another woman, referred to only as the widow of Philip March, for continuously disrupting the peace by inviting scholars into her house. As a widow, she may have been struggling financially, and these women were more at risk of turning to crime and prostitution. She was accused of engaging in prostitution with them and accommodating other prostitutes there, and was ordered on pain of banishment never to allow another scholar into her home again. Significantly, she was also banned from selling beer to students, a charge which reflects the perceived

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[173] Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, p. 365.
[174] *Registrum Cancellari Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, I , p. 128.
[175] Ibid., p. 332-333.
[176] Ibid., p. 128.

link between alcohol and prostitution, as it was suspected that she sold beer as a means of soliciting.[177] Preventing her from selling beer could be a sign that she had been acting as a procuress between the scholars of the university and available women.

Brundage argues that overall, frequenting these brothels or private houses was not thought a reason for shame in the fifteenth century, although clerics might be reprimanded by the church.[178] This was true of Oxford, as in Oxford the scholars might be reprimanded by the chancellor, although in reality sexual sin was seen to be the fault of the women, and therefore the scholars were rarely punished.

Overall, it seems clear that in Oxford the chancellor was responsible for preventing prostitution, not the ecclesiastical courts. However, the chancellors were often in holy orders. William Gray was chancellor between 1441 and 1442, eventually becoming treasurer to the exchequer and Bishop of Ely.[179] Gilbert Kymer acted as chancellor between 1431-4 and 1446-1453 and left his wife to be promoted to higher orders, eventually becoming physician to Humphrey, the Duke of Gloucester.[180] Finally, George Neville, of the wealthy English Neville family, acted as Chancellor between 1453-7, 1461 and 1463-72. He became Chancellor of England, and was later Archbishop of York.[181] Whilst these three men were acting as chancellors in Oxford, they were young men at the beginning of their careers, but these powerful men must have been intimidating to poor uneducated women.

What conclusions can be drawn about Oxford as a case study?

Overall, prostitution in Oxford was a reasonably 'casual' affair, with prostitutes both soliciting around the university and to travellers in the markets. Although evidence from the 1440s suggests there were brothels in St Peter in the East, brothels seem to have been uncommon and were not regulated in Oxford. Banishment was the decided punishment for prostitution in Oxford, although this seems to have been reserved for multiple offences or particularly notorious cases, and did not stop perpetrators from

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[177] *Munimenta Academica*, p. 718.
[178] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 529.
[179] A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A. D. 1500, Vol II: F to O*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 809.
[180] Ibid., p. 1068.
[181] Ibid., p. 1347.

returning. Apart from this, prostitutes may be threatened with the pillory or imprisonment, and those found harbouring or using prostitutes, or working as procuresses and pimps could be fined, although many abjured and received no further punishment.

The evidence from Oxford strongly suggests that towns with a large student population attracted prostitutes, although this is not necessarily surprising. What is perhaps more interesting is accusations about the clergy and friars engaging with prostitutes. The clergy in Oxford were accused of allowing dishonest women of loose morals into the Franciscan friary and into St Frideswide's Priory. Visitations in the fifteenth century seem to encourage the idea that friars, monks and nuns in Oxford engaged in illicit casual sexual relationships, with both prostitutes and students. Of course, these accusations may have also been directed at women acting as 'wives' or may have been entirely false, although injunctions forbade these relationships under the pain of excommunication or imprisonment. With so many injunctions and visitations, it is questionable whether attempts to control sex in Oxford were ever successful. It is possible that sex is simply 'uncontrollable', and later chapters will continue to question whether these efforts to control illicit sex ever really worked.

The case of John Rykener, a male transvestite prostitute working between London and Oxford in the 1390s, encourages the argument that both students and clergy engaged in illicit sex. Rykener was arrested in London for wearing women's clothing and engaging in sexual activity with another man in 1394. During his interrogation, he revealed some interesting things about his clientele. Rykener claimed to have 'practised the abominable vice' with three scholars in a marsh in Oxford often.[182] Moreover, he claimed to have stayed at the *Swan Inn* in Burford for six weeks, and whilst there had relations with two Franciscans, one other friar, and six travellers.[183] Finally, he stated that 'he often had sex as a man with many nuns and also had sex as a man with many women, married and otherwise [...] Rykener further confessed that many priests had committed the vice with him as with a woman, how many [he] did not know, and said that [he] accommodated priests more readily than any other people because they wished

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[182] One of these scholars is named as Sir William Foxlee, who may have also been a priest. See Karras and Boyd, '"*Ut Cum Muliere*": A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London', pp. 99-117 (p. 114). 'Walter' Ffoxle also appears in the record from 1350 as a regent master of the Franciscans. See Little, p. 169.

[183] The Swan Inn at Swinbrook, in Burford, is still standing.

to give [him] more than others.'[184] If true, Rykener's account reveals that men, women and ecclesiastical figures all supposedly engaged in illicit sex.

Finally, the evidence suggests that alongside illicit goings on taking place around *Grope Lane*, Oxford may have had a second red light district around King's Hall and possibly a number of small scale brothels in the parish of St Peter in the East. Notably, only the area around King's Hall could be considered 'marginal'. St Peter in the East had direct links to both the High Street and the eastern gate, and *Grope Lane* was directly connected to the High Street. This may encourage the idea that sex in Oxford was not marginalised at all, although the university chancellors did their best to regulate morality and keep prostitutes away from the university precinct.

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[184] Halsall, P., ed. 'The Questioning of John Rykener, A Male Cross-Dressing Prostitute, 1395,' *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (1998) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1395rykener.asp> [accessed 11 July 2019].

2. UNIVERSITY TOWNS: CAMBRIDGE

Much like Oxford, medieval prostitution in Cambridge has been mostly overlooked by scholars. Historians such as Janet Oswald have discussed sex in Cambridge, but during the nineteenth century, whilst other historians such as Honor Ridout have noted the existence of brothels but not discussed them in depth.[185] However, many records survive from the fifteenth century that shed light on illicit sex within Cambridge, and these can be used to evaluate patterns of illicit sexual activity in academic urban space. For example the *Grace Books*, which contain the proctors' financial accounts from 1454 to 1544, show that prostitution was prevalent at Stourbridge fair. This chapter will aim to assess the extent of sexual misconduct and punishment in Cambridge, and further question the topography of prostitution in university urban space.

By the thirteenth century Cambridgeshire was one of the most important centres for marketing agricultural supplies in East Anglia.[186] Stourbridge fair had been founded and disillusioned students of Oxford began to arrive at the town.[187] With them came increased demand for commodities and by the end of the fifteenth century an estimated 1,300 students lived in the town centre.[188] Despite this, the town remained medium sized, although new building for the university led to increased building work for the town's residents. With work opportunities came increasing numbers of impoverished people from the surrounding villages, and from at least the thirteenth century a growing class of unemployed, servants, poor widows and the sick emerged. These 'new' poor migrants had an even tougher time out of work in the town because unlike the existing poor residents, they had no social links and little economic help from the established forms of charity which were directed at the parish poor.[189] Women could expect lower wages than men, which decreased further during the winter months when work days

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[185] Honor Ridout, *Cambridge and Stourbridge Fair* (Cambridge: Blue Ocean Publishing, 2011), and Janet Oswald, 'The Spinning House Girls: Cambridge University's distinctive policing of prostitution', *Urban History*, 39 (2012), 453-470 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0963926812000223> [accessed 11 July 2019].

[186] Miri Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 35

[187] Patrick Zutshi questions the reasons for this migration, and concludes that it likely occurred between 1208 and January 1210. See Patrick Zutshi, 'The Dispersal of Scholars from Oxford and the Beginnings of a University at Cambridge: A Study of the Sources', *English Historical Review*, 528, 127 (2012), 1043-1062 (p. 1046) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ces209> [accessed 11 July 2019].

[188] Rubin, p. 35.

[189] Ibid., p. 39.

were shorter.[190] However, as conditions in the villages improved during the fourteenth century, fewer poor peasants would have felt the need to move to the town, and after the Black Death in 1348 rents were lowered, creating more affordable and more pleasant living situations.[191]

Unlike Oxford, Cambridge was somewhat isolated and had no high town walls to defend it. Whilst the town was defended by the Kings Ditch from the 1260s, by the fourteenth century, the castle had fallen into disrepair.[192] By the fifteenth century, it was entirely in ruins and some of the stone originally from the castle was recycled and used to build King's College in 1441. The ditch protected the east side of the town, with the west side and northern gate protected by the river Cam, which was hugely beneficial to the town because it brought steady trade to the burgess community. Additionally, the town had a large market place and by 1279, seventy-five shops and booths were recorded.[193] Although this attracted trade, the ditch and river left little space for urban expansion.[194] Before 1500, at least sixteen inns existed in the centre of Cambridge, including St Nicholas' hostel which had a reputation for rowdiness and inter-house brawls.[195] Medieval travellers and tradesmen alike were further attracted to the town to visit the ever expanding Stourbridge fair on Stourbridge Common (in the north east of Cambridge, just under two miles away from the town centre), which from 1400 had become one of the great four fairs of the medieval period.[196] Overall, the town had more inhabitants by the thirteenth century, as immigrants from the countryside and from other towns came for work, with the highest number of parishioners recorded in the parishes of St Benet's, St Mary the Great and St Clements.[197]

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[190] Ibid., p. 41.

[191] Ibid., p. 49.

[192] For more on the evolution of the King's Ditch, see M. D. Lobel, ed. 'Cambridge 3: Cambridge in the 13th Century', in *The Atlas of Historic Towns, Volume II* (London: Scolar Press, 1975) < <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/sites/historictownsatlas/files/atlas/town/cambridge_3_the_13th_century.pdf> > [accessed 11 July 2019], p. 12.

[193] Ibid., p. 8.

[194] Oswald, p. 454.

[195] *VCH; A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, Volume III: The City and University of Cambridge*, ed. by J.P.C Roach and Helen M. Cam (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 161. See p. 115 for a full list of the inns names.

[196] M. D. Lobel, ed. 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', in *The Atlas of Historic Towns, Volume II* (London: Scolar Press, 1975) < <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/sites/historictownsatlas/files/atlas/town/cambridge_4_the_later_middle_ages.pdf> > [accessed 11 July 2019], p. 14.

[197] Lobel, 'Cambridge 3: Cambridge in the 13th Century', *The Atlas of Historic Towns, Volume II* < <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/sites/historictownsatlas/files/atlas/town/cambridge_3_the_13th_century.pdf> > [accessed 11 July 2019], p. 8.

The topography of Cambridge and buildings that may indicate sex

By the thirteenth century, Cambridge was split into seven wards and seventeen parishes. A number of these parishes lay in the centre of the town, and St Mary's church was adjacent to Cambridge's busy market square.[198] There were also two Benedictine houses and at least four friaries by 1300.[199] Many ecclesiastical houses (even in the marketplace) had gardens, and these could be used for illicit sexual activity. It is likely that streetwalkers took their clients onto the land surrounding the colleges known as 'the backs'.[200] The *Annals of Cambridge*, written in five volumes by the nineteenth-century historian Charles Henry Cooper as a chronological history of Cambridge, says that there were at least three hospitals within Cambridge by 1450.[201] Records of the Hospital of St John the Baptist show that although the sick and weak were admitted, 'pregnant women, lepers, wounded people and the insane' were not welcome, especially in the case of single pregnant women. This reflected rules at the Hospital of St John's in Oxford, where the moral structure refused admitting 'lewd pregnant women'. Miri Rubin suggests that this was because the house was an entirely male community, and therefore it would have been unable to accommodate women in labour. However, although most hospitals excluded pregnant women, it is notable that both hospitals felt the need to specify the 'type' of pregnant woman excluded, as 'lewd' or by associating them with 'lepers', which encourages the idea that these woman were likely believed to be unwed mothers who had become pregnant through illicit sex.

As can be seen by Braun's map below, urban space was confined, and the market square was therefore used by town and gown alike. Oswald argues that because of its small poorly lit passageways, the area would have become potentially dangerous at night.[202] This argument holds some weight, and as will be discussed further, the proctors were certainly concerned about night wanderers and vagabonds. Of course,

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[198] Jennifer Kermode, 'The greater towns 1300-1540', in *CUHB*, ed. by, pp. 441-465 (p. 443), and *The Churchwardens' Accounts of St Mary the Great, Cambridge from 1504 to 1635*, ed. by J. E. Foster (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), p. 22 describes the location of the church as 'next the market of Cambrygge.'

[199] Kermode, p. 442-443.

[200] Named as such because the colleges backed onto the River Cam. Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', *The Atlas of Historic Towns, Volume II* < <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/sites/historictownsatlas/files/atlas/town/cambridge_4_the_later_middle_ages.pdf> > [accessed 11 July 2019], p. 16. Oswald argues that this area of land was still notorious for prostitution in the 1800s. See Oswald, p. 463.

[201] *Annals of Cambridge, Volume I*, ed. by Charles Henry Cooper (Cambridge: Warwick & Co. 1842), p. 229 and Kermode, p. 443.

[202] Oswald, p. 454.

these conditions would have made procuration and prostitution much easier within the market. Women who were arrested could be sent to one of two gaols. The castle's postern contained one of these prisons. It stood in a tower in the eastern part of the castle, although in his work on Cambridge castle, Palmer comments that the prison's defences were not particularly good before 1600, which meant that prisoners often escaped and took sanctuary in the town.[203] In an attempt to prevent this, the prison was moved after 1600 to a gatehouse in the south side of the castle.[204]

As there was no *Gropecunt Lane* in Cambridge, a topographical study of illicit sexual activity in the town is not straightforward. This chapter will discuss areas supposedly notorious for sexual activity, however, and a study of the shape of the town centre encourages the idea that prostitutes were active around market hill, near St Mary the Great's Church, and in Barnwell. In his research on Cambridge, Bushell points out that the histories of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford and St Mary the Great in Cambridge are 'very similar' and both were used as university churches. Moreover, both seem to have been built in areas notorious for sexual activity, St Mary the Virgin in Oxford being adjacent to *Gropecunt Lane* and St Mary the Great in Cambridge positioned close to the medieval market. Bushell argues that this was because 'both universities, beginning without any buildings of their own, made use of the nearest church', which seems likely, and perhaps it was this decision that coincidentally attracted prostitutes in both towns to locate themselves there. [205]

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[203] W. D. Palmer, *Cambridge Castle*, ed. by M. J. Petty (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1976), pp. 13-15. The castle prison was still being used until at least 1713, see pp. 20-30. For more on the distinction between the two prisons, see *VCH, A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, pp. 116-120.
[204] Oswald, pp. 461-3.
[205] W. D. Bushell, *The Church of St Mary the Great, The University Church at Cambridge* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1948), p. 20.

Map of Cambridge from 1575, demonstrating the lack of space which led to the 'town and gown' disputes, and the limited suburban development. George Braun, 'Civitates Orbis Terrarum' in *University of Cambridge Digital Library* <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-ATLAS-00004-00057-00003/1> [accessed 11 July 2019]. The map is not drawn to the points of a compass; instead the top is west Cambridge and the bottom east.

Map of Cambridge, c.1500, drawn by me to show the location of some of the key locations discussed in this chapter, and demonstrating access to the Barnwell Brothels and Stourbridge Fair. Based on M. Lobel, ed. 'Cambridge', *The Atlas of Historic Towns, Volume II* (London: Scolar Press, 1975) <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/atlas/volume-ii/atlas-historic-towns-volume-2/cambridge> [accessed 11 July 2019].

CAMBRIDGE, C. 1500

Castle, site of the prison until c. 1600

St John's College

St Mary's Church

King's College

Queen's College

River Cam

Stourbridge Common

To Barnwell

Barnwell Causeway

Barnwell Gate

Jesus College

King's Ditch

Marketplace and Guildhall

Peterhouse
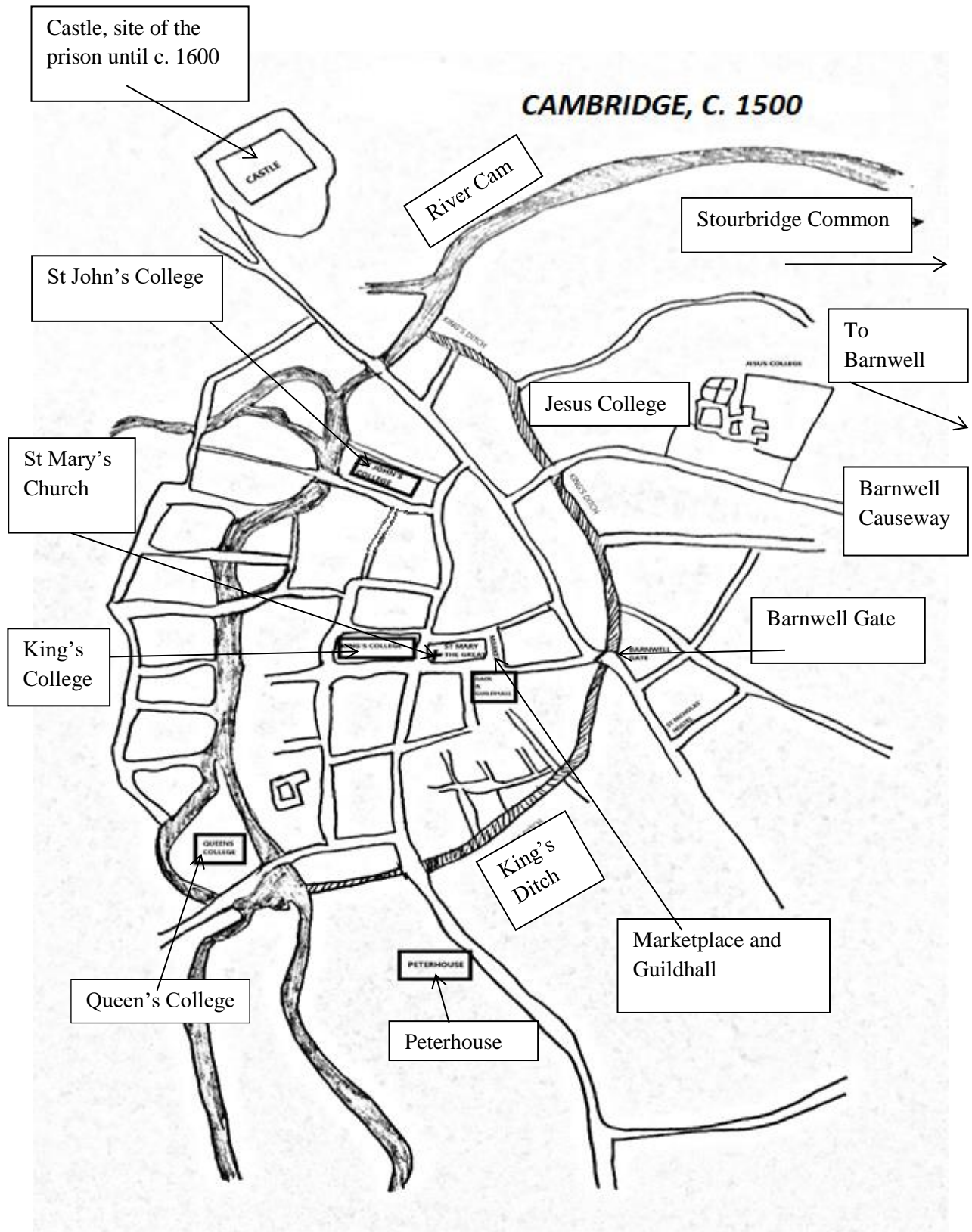
Measures to prevent the students engaging in illicit sex

The University Chancellor

After the migration of disillusioned Oxfordshire scholars c.1209, the University of Cambridge evolved as an organised body and steadily began to develop a presence within the town. By the mid-fifteenth century, work on King's College, Queen's College, and St John's were all under way in the western part of the town, and a new academic quarter with royal foundations had begun to dominate the town. In *The Atlas of Historic Towns*, Lobel estimates that these measured about '220 ft. long x 80 ft. wide and were probably a row of houses', whilst others mimicked collegiate halls and could have chapels, libraries and galleries.[206] Despite being geographically smaller than Oxford, Cambridge had attracted a similar number of students: it is estimated that, by 1450, approximately 1,300 students resided within the town. Although we do not know how many people lived in Cambridge, Lobel estimates that 3,000 inhabitants is likely to be too low, which still suggest that the students made up almost a third of the population of Cambridge.[207] Some of these students had taken to living in the town outside of the halls and colleges, but as in Oxford, this practice was banned by 1495, as attempts were made to withdraw the students from the distractions of the town and in order to apply themselves diligently to their study. [208] By the early 1500s there had been a gradual decrease in the number of hostels used by the university. Previously, the students had rented small houses from the town's burgesses, which were then each presided over by a principal who was in charge of rents, but, because of increasing costs, this trend began to decrease.[209]

As in Oxford, the university chancellor had great authority over the town.[210] Much resentment occurred in the town because of the university's jurisdiction, shown

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[206] Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', p. 15, for example St Bernard's hostel.

[207] The 1377 tax poll shows that in 1377, 1,902 people paid tax, which had dropped to only 550 in 1524-5. See Kermode, p. 442 and Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', p. 12.

[208] John S. Lee, *Cambridge and its Economic Region, 1450-1560* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005), pp. 63-65.

[209] Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', p. 14. This seems to have been initiated by King's Hall as a response to rising costs within the town.

[210] Zutshi suggests this may in part have been because Cambridge was not an episcopal seat, allowing the chancellor more independence. See Zutshi, 'The Dispersal of Scholars from Oxford and the Beginnings of a University at Cambridge', p. 1056.

by what has been captioned the 'town and gown' disputes.[211] Conflict between the townspeople and members of the university must have been further aggravated by the configuration of urban space, as Oswald remarks; both the town and gown were 'confined to a small oval-shaped area between the broad curve of the river and the King's Ditch'. In 1584, the Privy Council asked the vice-chancellors and the mayor to work together to check on landlords who were dividing houses into smaller tenements in an attempt to prevent overcrowding.[212] This problem seems to have been alleviated only during times of plague. During his time studying at Queen's College, Cambridge, in the south-western part of the town across the River Cam, the renowned theologian Desiderius Erasmus tells us that 'almost all of [the] scholars have taken flight, with the intention of safe-guarding their health in the countryside'.[213]

Residents and students had different places within urban society, and disputes were magnified by their close living quarters.[214] It is hardly surprising that the town felt resentment towards the university when we consider the charters set out in the fourteenth century which decided who held power in the town. In 1382, King Richard II removed power from the mayor and bailiffs.[215] These powers were swiftly granted to the university chancellor, to whom had been given the guardianship of the assize of bread, wine and beer, the supervision of weights and measures, the power to inquire into bad food and ale and the power to punish offenders and raise fines, although letters patent from 1394 show that some powers were eventually returned to the town.[216] The

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[211] Disputes between the town authorities and the University occurred continuously from around 1231, when conflicts arouse surrounding who had control of the markets. The burgesses felt that their privileges were under threat, whilst the University felt the need to protect its members from being cheated through false weights and measures by medieval traders. The situation came to a head in 1261 when a violent conflict resulted in sixteen scholars being executed. For more on this, see Lobel, 'Cambridge 3: Cambridge in the 13th Century', p. 7.

[212] Oswald, p. 454 and *VCH, A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p.14.

[213] *Erasmus and Cambridge: The Cambridge Letters of Erasmus*, trans. by D.F.S Thomson and ed. by H.C. Porter (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 207.

[214] Throughout the thirteenth century, the King was forced to make commissions between the burgesses and scholars in attempts to maintain the peace. See *Cal PR, Henry III, A.D. 1247-1258* (London: Mackie & Co. Ltd, 1908) p. 53; *Cal PR, Henry III, A.D. 1258-1266* (London: Hereford Times Co. Ltd, 1910), p.146 and pp. 180-1; *Cal PR, Henry III, A.D. 1266-1272* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1913), p. 357.

[215] *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge*, ed. by Frederic W. Maitland and Mary Bateson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), p.25.

[216] *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge*, pp. 27-29. Although the King stated that these liberties were taken away from the town because of revolt, the King was probably also swayed by the fact that the University paid him £10 annually for these rights. See *VCH, A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p. 155; Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', p. 13. The plague had a devastating impact on the town- the town Mayor, three masters of St John's hospital and the prior of Barnwell all died, along with nearly all of the parishioners in the Jewry at All Saints. Also see *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge,* p. 39. Apparently there had been two big fires in Cambridge, which when added

burgesses were given the power to once again punish fugitives who were resident in the town, so long as these did not affect privileges given to the university chancellor and did not relate to incidents involving students, teachers or staff of the university. Furthermore, as soon as it became apparent that the scholars, servants or staff were not involved, the university chancellor should not hinder the burgesses of the town from punishing fugitives.[217]

The university chancellor maintained a strong presence in the town throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Like the chancellor of Oxford, the chancellor of Cambridge continued to make inquisitions regarding behaviour within the town, and these often shed light on sexual activity. As early as 1317, King Edward II called upon the local authorities to banish prostitutes at the request of the chancellor of the university. On the 6 June 1317, a charter granted to the university chancellor forbade any 'common woman' to dwell within the town of Cambridge or the suburbs. Furthermore, the mayor and bailiffs were commanded 'at the warning of the university chancellor' to banish all such women from the town at least four times a year. These women were to be banished under pain of imprisonment.[218] Additionally, on the 23 October 1327, King Edward III again granted that no common women could reside within the town or suburbs, and that at the warning of the chancellor the mayor and bailiffs should 'make proclamation or inhibition' again four times a year or more frequently. Furthermore, should any common women be found residing in the town three or more days after the proclamation, she would be imprisoned in the king's prison.[219] That the king asked the town to do this at the will of the university chancellor can only have made the pre-existing tensions between 'town and gown' worse, especially because from 1317 the mayor and bailiffs were obliged to swear to maintain the privileges of the university.[220] Furthermore, in 1498 the senior proctor's book records a proclamation which established again the privileges and customs of the university chancellor. It stated that the chancellor held jurisdiction in cases which

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to the horror caused by an outbreak of Black Death in Cambridge in 1349, forced the residents to petition the King for relief.

[217] *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge,* pp. 43-45.

[218] *Annals of Cambridge,* I, p. 76.

[219] Ibid., p. 83. Like Salter, Cooper deliberately left the term 'prostitution' out of his description of the contents. Instead, his titles reflect other themes in the charters. In the letters patent for 1327 for example, Cooper lists the contents as 'Confirmation and enlargement of the University Privileges' and mentions nothing of the banishment of prostitutes. It is not clear where the King's prison was, although the old Guildhall, or Tollbooth, also acted as a prison. See Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', pp. 15-16.

[220] Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, p. 364 and Lobel, 'Cambridge 3: Cambridge in the 13th Century', p. 8.

required banishment or imprisonment, but that the chancellor might not be absent from the university for more than one month, presumably because of the fear that disorder might arise in the town during his absence.[221]

Rights of the chancellors continued to be set out in the fifteenth century, when alongside punishing immorality, the chancellor, Robert Woodlark, was given the power to punish offenders by 'pecuniary penalties or imprisonment'. Along with being able to enquire and punish, on 12 April 1459, King Henry VI gave the chancellor the power 'to banish from the University for four miles circumjacent, all prostitutes and immodest and incontinent women within the university or the precincts of the same […] So that no such women so banished should presume to dwell within four miles around the University'.[222] It is notable that the university chancellor of Cambridge was only allowed to banish the women from within four miles, whilst the Oxford chancellor was granted ten, although Oxford was comparably larger.[223] Again, the inclusion of 'incontinent women', which had been noted in the 1461 writ to Oxford, may have been based on a pre-existing distinction between professional sex workers and casual sexual activity. If a banished woman refused to leave, or worse, returned to within four miles of the university precincts, the chancellor was moreover given the authority to imprison her within the town, after which she would again be banished from his demesne.[224]

The Students

The students in Cambridge were bound by the same rules of those living in Oxford; they were expected to adhere to a strict lifestyle, which regulated their attire and leisure activities, and where they were allowed to live and eat. Students who disobeyed could be fined, or in extreme cases, receive corporal punishment such as flogging.[225] In 1294, Edward I confirmed an act which commanded the sheriff of Cambridge that if any scholar was 'devoting himself rather to misdeeds than to his studies', assuming that the burgesses could not imprison the students in question, the

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[221] *Documents relating to the University and Colleges of Cambridge, Volume I*, 3 vols, (London: Longmans et al, 1852), p. 311.

[222] *Annals of Cambridge*, I, p. 209-10. See also *Documents Relating to the University and Colleges of Cambridge*, I, p. 55-56.

[223] This can also be seen by the 1377 poll tax, in which Cambridge had 1,902 people recorded against Oxford which had 2,537. This should have included every layperson above the age of fourteen, except the very poor, although these results are dubious. See Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).

[224] *Annals of Cambridge*, I, p. 209-10.

[225] For more on this see Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, pp. 351-400.

sheriff should take the student to gaol 'until the chancellor requests their release'.[226] By 1502, this act had been amended to appease the privileges held by the university so that any scholar or servant of a scholar arrested 'by the mayor or any other officer of the town [has seven days to provide proof that he is a privileged member of the university]… and upon such certificate shall be immediately discharged'.[227] The students were expected to maintain a moral and sober countenance, and were supposed to deny their bodily pleasures. Despite this, in 1344, Peterhouse was forced to issue a statute stating that scholars accused of criminal or immoral acts would be 'corrected', although if this was unsuccessful they would be ejected from the college without hope of returning. In addition, if any scholars were found guilty of perjury, sacrilege, theft, robbery, rape, murder, adultery, incest, or striking another scholar, they would also be immediately expelled from the college. Those suspected of having 'access to women', probably meaning prostitutes, or caught engaging in 'evil' scholastic conversations, would be punished accordingly by the dean.[228]

Cobban argues that these actions did not have the desired effect, instead accentuating 'strong libertarian tendencies' which manifested in drunkenness, immorality and disorder.[229] This is hardly surprising when we consider the location of students within the town itself: from around 1209 students heard lectures, took degrees and held celebrations within St Mary the Great's church, located in the centre of the town, immediately to the west of the university, next to the town's market.[230] Cobban's argument is supported by the town authorities' concerns, as they complained that the students 'married, became drapers, mercers, grocers, inn-holders, bakers and brewers' but refused to hold office or serve on juries.[231] Attempts were continuously made to prevent the students from acting immorally, and in 1498 the senior proctor's book records that students found to be breaking into houses, raping women, plotting against others, carrying arms without due cause, or suspected of participating in the occult

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[226] *Cal PR, Edward I, A.D. 1292- 1301* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1895), p. 101.

[227] *A Collection of Statutes, and other documents from the MS library of the Corpus Christi College, Illustrative of the history of the University of Cambridge, during the period of the Reformation, from A.D. 1500, to A.D. 1572*, ed. by J. Lamb (London: J.W. Parker, 1838), p. 2.

[228] *Documents relating to the University and Colleges of Cambridge, Volume II*, 3 vols, (London: Longmans et al, 1852), pp. 36-37 and 84.

[229] Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, p. 363.

[230] For more information on St Mary's, see *The Churchwardens' Accounts of St Mary the Great, Cambridge from 1504 to 1635*.

[231] Lobel, 'Cambridge 4: The Later Middle Ages', p. 13.

'without hope of restitution' would be ejected from the university or sent to prison, although this punishment remained at the chancellor's discretion.[232]

The universities attitude to women mimicked its strict adherence to morality: women should be kept as far away as possible so that they could not tempt the students from their studies. Despite this, women could be benefactors of the university and were able to work as laundresses, assuming they were elderly and lived within the town. Additionally, houses such as Peterhouse did have structures in place to accept female visitors, although these were strictly chaperoned. In God's House (today Christ's College), female visitors were allowed only if male members of their family were sick, whilst Corpus Christi would allow mothers and sisters to visit. Although scholars were supposed to dedicate themselves diligently to their studies, not all the colleges maintained a strict barrier between the students and female members of the community. Indeed, accounts from King's College show that the students regularly associated with women during Hock tide.[233] Overall however, as in Oxford, women were kept at a steady arm's length from the university wherever possible, the university was made up of young, unmarried men and the university chancellors saw it as their responsibility to uphold the students' physical and moral welfare by isolating them from female company.[234]

Red light districts on the margins: Stourbridge fair and the Barnwell Brothels

Sex at the fair

In Oxford, sex was certainly not marginal, but what about Cambridge? Did illicit sex take place inside the town walls or was non-marital sex pushed outside the chancellor's jurisdiction? Stourbridge fair, sometimes referred to as *Streressbrigge, Stirbitch* or *Sturbridge* fair, became one of the biggest medieval fairs in Europe. In 1589, it was noted as being 'by far the largest and most famous fair in all England', although it was celebrated long before this date.[235] Despite this, the fair actually had

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[232] *Documents Relating to the University and Colleges of Cambridge,* I, p. 335.
[233] Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities*, pp. 378-380.
[234] Oswald, p. 454.
[235] *VCH, A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p. 92.

modest beginnings, it was granted to the leper hospital of St Mary Magdalene by King John in 1211 to raise charity for lepers. The foundation of the church is unclear, although in a petition to the king from 1299-1300, the burgesses of Cambridge claim that is was founded by their ancestors.[236] However, by 1279, the hospital had no patients and the fair had outgrown its original purpose. Despite lasting only a few days in 1279, by 1516 the fair lasted a full month, from the 24 August to 29 September, and had affected street names within Cambridge, such as *Oyster Row*. The fair was well known for selling both luxury and everyday products, and as such had both a social and economic importance within the town as both the town and gown profited.[237] Not all traders lodged in the town; some chose to stay onsite behind their booths in small purpose-built bedrooms, in tents around the fair site or underneath wagons or carts. Small traders, pedlars and entertainers tended to find spaces in cheap inns, outhouses and barns in villages nearby, such as Chesterton or Barnwell. Ridout says that 'they mingled with the poorest of the fair's customers and the rag-tag assortment of beggars, petty thieves and prostitutes also hoping to make their way'.[238]

From at least the early 1500s, the fair was known to have attracted sex workers, though it was likely prevalent before this, too. In his ballad, *A Warning for all good fellows to take heede of Punckes inticements*, c. 1615 or 1625, Robert Guy indicates that prostitutes regularly moved between fairs because of the increased prospects of clients. He writes that whores went from St James fair to Smithfield to Bartholomew fair, but he is most concerned with their presence corrupting men at Stourbridge. His ballad reads 'all you wanton wenches, which in Venus delight, A little come listen, what I shall recite: And let this same Dittie, cause you to beware: How that you come anymore, at Sturbridge faire'.[239]

From 1485-6, the *Grace Books* consistently support the theory that prostitutes haunted Stourbridge fair and indicate, moreover, that searches were often made by the university authorities for vagabonds most frequently during times of merriment such as fairs and feast days. As a result enquiries became more common before, during and after

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[236] *TNA*, SC/8/320/E420. The burgesses sought remedy from the king because Hugh de Balsham, the bishop of Ely, had appropriated the church, along with the church of St John the Evangelist, for use by the scholars.

[237] The fair was eventually closed in the eighteenth century, because of alleged freak shows, prostitution and peep shows. The fair was brought back on 10 September, 2011. See 'The 800-year old story of Stourbridge Fair', in *University of Cambridge Research* <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/the-800-year-old-story-of-stourbridge-fair> [accessed 11 July 2019].

[238] Ridout, pp. 21-22.

[239] *The Pepys Ballads, Volume I: 1535-1625, Numbers 1-45*, ed. by H. E. Rollins, 5 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 1.288-289 (pp. 263-6).

Stourbridge fair.[240] In this context, the term 'vagabond' does not just include thieves, but also night-wanderers, incontinent women and professional prostitutes. Karras argues that 'women who were labelled vagabonds harboured in people's houses where they slept during the day and stayed up at night, playing illicit games and promoting immorality', and consequently they are not always described explicitly as 'whores' in the records.[241] The *Grace Books* reported that the proctors were inquiring for these 'nocte vagantibus' at Stourbridge, often alongside expenses for keeping the peace.[242] Enquiries for suspect people at Stourbridge either became more common in the early sixteenth century, or were being more frequently recorded. Between 1517 and 1535, the *Grace Books* recorded six annual inquisitions taking place at the fair, which doubled in cost from 5s in 1518 to 10s in 1527.[243] The majority of these refer to night wanderers or vagabonds, but by 1527 the *Grace Books* name prostitutes separately and state that the proctor and his servants searched for them before, during and after the fair; 'item in inquisicionibus meis et college et famulorum pro vagabundis et meretricibus tam noctu dieque ante nundinas, in nundinas et post nundinas Stirbriginas, xˢ'.[244] In c.1537, the *Grace Books* again record expenses 'for sekyng vagabowndes and common women afore Sturbryge fayr'.[245]

Proclamations were made at the beginning of the fair by both the university authorities and the mayor separately. The chancellor's proclamation shows that the university authorities were aware of the likelihood of prostitutes showing up at the fair. The proclamation declared 'also we charge and command that common women and [vagabonds] avoid and withdraw themselves from the Fair and precincts of the same immediately after this cry'[246]. Penalties included imprisonment, stocks, pillory or whipping, but crime must have been a common problem at the fair, especially theft, as even expensive booths only had cloth doors. Proclamations and searches certainly would not have prevented poor prostitutes from taking advantage of the increased number of customers brought to Cambridge by the fair, and in 1611 this is shown in the

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[240] See for example, *Grace Book B, Part II: Containing the Accounts of the Proctors of the University of Cambridge, 1511-1544,* ed. by Mary Bateson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), p. 56 and *Grace Book A: Containing the Proctors' Accounts and other records of the University of Cambridge for the years 1454-1488*, ed. by S. M. Leathes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), p. 226.

[241] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 71.

[242] For example, *Grace Book B: Part I, Containing the Proctors' Accounts and other records of the University of Cambridge for the years 1488-1511*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 11, 23, 214, and 232.

[243] See *Grace Book B, Part II*, pp. 62, 70, 84, 147, 194 and 199.

[244] Ibid., p. 147.

[245] Ibid., p. 212.

[246] Ridout, pp. 72-73.

Fair Book when a man referred to as 'Clappam' from London was imprisoned for bringing around fifty-five 'wenches' to the fair and for hiring a booth to use as a temporary brothel.[247]

Alongside Stourbridge fair, Midsomer Fair was also hosted in Cambridge, and belonged to the prior at Barnwell. It was held on Midsummer Common, to the north east of the town outside the town walls. Again, although the fair was supposedly outside the jurisdiction of the university chancellors, the *Grace Books* reveal that the proctors requested expenses to search for vagabonds during fair time. In 1505, an inquiry into vagabonds at Midsomer Fair included 'item pro pace servanda et vagabundis inquirendis et inquirendo pro clausura ultra Barnwell' indicating that the proctors were concerned about vagabonds remaining in Barnwell after the fair had closed.[248]

Barnwell

Ridout remarks that the north-eastern hamlet of Barnwell long had a reputation for brothels and because of its excellent location between the town and the fair, away from the prying eyes of the university proctors, it was here that travellers to the fair would go to engage in illicit sex.[249] Topographically, it makes sense that both prostitutes and customers who were attracted to the fair would settle in Barnwell, as a designated area in which to bring punters. It is not clear when the Barnwell brothels began: maps of Cambridge up to the 1350s show some built-up areas but mostly fields in Barnwell. By the 1700s however the area had become notorious for brothels and remained so until the mid-nineteenth century.[250]

Barnwell attracted prostitutes because it was outside the jurisdiction of the university chancellor, although it continuously crops up in the *Grace Books*. Although it is evident that the brothels were known to the chancellor, he had no power to prevent travellers to the fair from frequenting them, although searches conducted there suggest that the proctors were concerned that the students were also visiting the Barnwell brothels. In 1523, an entry in the accounts states that the proctor 'serchyd in Barnwell

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[247] Ridout, pp. 72-73. See also p. 74; the failure of the proclamation was reiterated by the fact that in his *A Step to Stir-Bitch-Fair*, written in 1700, Ned Ward claimed that girls came to the fair from Lynn and remained on barges on the river Cam which became floating brothels. 'Clappam' may simply be indication of where the man was from, as in Clapham, London (then Surrey).
[248] *Grace Book B: Part I,* p. 213.
[249] Ridout, p. 74.
[250] See R. Beverley, *A Letter to His Royal Highness, The Duke of Gloucester, Chancellor, on the present and corrupt state of the University of Cambridge* (London: James Dinnis, 1833), p. 19 on Barnwell in the 1830s, and *VCH, A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p. 113.

twyse' although his objective is not recorded.[251] The proctor's accounts for 1535-6, compiled whilst Thomas Cromwell was chancellor, report that 2s 10d was spent on searching for prostitutes in Barnwell once during the day and once at night and for driving them out from the university: 'item querendo meretrices bis apud Barnewell semel interdiu et semel nocte et eas exturbando ab universitate'.[252] The link between the Barnwell brothels and Stourbridge fair was again made by the proctors in 1536, and *Grace Book B* notes the ruling that the inhabitants of Barnwell should not admit prostitutes into their homes at the start of Stourbridge fair.[253] The fact that the proctor's expenses included so many searches for prostitution in an area outside of his jurisdiction, suggests concern that scholars were enjoying the delights of the fair and finishing up in the Barnwell brothels. Although the fair was outside the centre of the town, the brothels in Barnwell would still have been easily accessible, not just to visitors to the fair but also to the residents and students, as Barnwell causeway led directly into the town, near the church of All Saints and the Franciscan friary. A petition to the king by Thomas Paunfeld in 1414, further demonstrates that although the chancellor had no right to punish prostitutes in Barnwell, the prior of Barnwell was able to imprison and banish criminals, which may mean that he had the power to punish prostitutes.[254]

What evidence is there that the clergy were engaging in 'illicit' sex outside the town?

Like Oxford, there was a large number of clergy living in Cambridge, some of whom were affiliated with the university. The friars played a major role in establishing the university, and studied theology there.[255] There were also a number of large priories and abbeys in Cambridgeshire. Like the clergy and students of Oxford, all these were assumed to be celibate and virtuous, although visitations held during the fifteenth

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[251] *Grace Book B, Part II*, p. 116.
[252] Ibid., p. 198
[253] Ibid., p. 206.
[254] *TNA*, SC 8/23/1143A. Paunfeld complained that the canons had unlawfully outlawed him. His petition to the king is quite lengthy and this is taken from part one. For part 2, see *TNA*, SC 8/23/1143B. Giancano argues that the full petition is 'clearly a personal statement from a man who suffered repeated frustrations with the legal system.' See M. Giancano, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 222-226.
[255] Lee, p. 75.

century indicate that illicit sexual activity was at least perceived to be taking place within these institutions.

It is clear that by 1432, Bishop William Gray of Lincoln had become deeply concerned about what was happening within Huntingdon Priory, in the nearby village of Huntingdon. Gray says that was because the canons frequented the house of John Clerke which was 'grievously in suspicion'. The house so concerned Gray that he added that anyone from the convent found at Clerk's house would face imprisonment.[256] Gray's suspicions were, perhaps, not without foundation. John Clerke's house again appears at the centre of controversy in William Alnwick's visitations seven years later in 1439. Alnwick found that the sub-prior Peter Oclee had suspect relationships with various women, some of whom were married. Again, John Clerke's house appears to have been the focus of the controversy. Oclee was accused of having a relationship with both Clerke's daughter Joan and his wife Maud, whilst Brother John Overtone was also accused of adultery with Clerke's wife.[257] In total, Oclee was accused of incontinence with eight different women. Oclee not only denied these claims, but also remarked that he had never seen these women in the priory. Whether Alnwick believed these accusations may be debated. He certainly commanded that those accused should repent, which would indicate that he believed that illicit sexual activity had been taking place in the priory amongst the canons. Overtone was ordered to clear his name by three other canons, upon which he was asked to abjure Maud Clerke and all familiarity with her household under pain of excommunication. Oclee's punishment is less clear, although Alnwick remarked that he would reserve the power of inflicting every penalty under law against the prior.[258]

In 1432, Gray also commanded the monks of Ramsey Abbey, in the nearby village of Ramsey, to the north of the town, not to eat or drink in the towns of Ramsey or Bury or 'stay there with women' under the pain of imprisonment.[259] Evidently, the monks of Ramsey Abbey made few attempts to refrain, and in 1439, Alnwick found that the monks commonly frequented Bury and spent time being intimate with women there. The monks were accused of going to Bury and drinking with the almoner, admitting women 'within the monastery… drinking and other irregularities', and that when they

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[256] *VDL*, I, pp. 76-78.
[257] Further accusations against the canons can be seen in *VDL*, II, p. 150-152. Thompson notes that Clerke appears with three surnames in the record: Clerke, his parentage, Derham, his hometown, and Plummer, his trade.
[258] *VDL*, II, pp. 153-155.
[259] *VDL*, I, pp. 104-105.

went to Bury they sent for suspect women, or 'if they dare not send for them, they go to them in their cottages.'[260] Alnwick's injunctions warned that no women should be admitted to the cloister under the pain of excommunication, and that any monks found eating in Ramsey or Bury should be confined within the cloister. Finally, Alnwick claimed that the monks had been hiring 'women of ill-fame' to till the orchards and gardens, which they must stop under pain of confinement.[261]

The priory of St Neots, in the nearby village of St Neots to the west of Cambridge, was likewise banned from allowing women and secular persons into the cloister precincts. The brothers were further banned from having access to the town of St Neots, having company and eating or drinking in the town without asking the prior.[262] Apparently Gray's assumption that asking the prior's permission to go into the town was misguided; Alnwick's visitation in 1439 found that the prior had a suspect relationship with a married woman from Hardwick named Agnes Actone. The prior denied this, but abjured all familiar conversation with the said woman nonetheless. Another brother, John Caxton, was accused of adultery with Joan Coke of St Neots who was also married, although Caxton likewise denied any guilt. Of the cases reported in the visitations, the most common punishments seem to have been abjuration from the women and abstaining from drunkenness under pain of excommunication, even if those involved denied the accusations against them. [263]

Inquisition and Punishment: Searches for prostitutes

Thus far, the *Grace Books* have proved extremely useful to understanding inquisition during Stourbridge fair, although they also show that inquisitions by the university were being made throughout the year, not just during times of high merriment such as the fair. From 1493, the books record that the proctors had been inquiring after vagabonds near the university and elsewhere in the town.[264] Again, these inquisitions listed searches for vagabonds, night wanderers, suspect persons, disturbances of the peace and more broadly 'malefactores' which undoubtedly included

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[260] Translated by Thompson. *VDL*, III, pp. 303-4.
[261] Ibid., pp. 307-314.
[262] *VDL*, I, pp. 110-111.
[263] *VDL*, III, p. 322-327.
[264] *Grace Book B: Part I*, p. 63. See also pp. 69, 97, and 137.

prostitutes. In 1510 and 1511-12, the annual cost of these inquiries was 26s 8d.[265] The accounts also show that the scholars were sometimes the object of these searches; 'item pro inquisicione scolarium per noctum vagancium, x^s'. Although not listed separately prior to the 1500s, from at least 1521, the proctors began to list searches specifically for prostitutes, referring to them either as *scortis* or as *meretrices*. In 1521, the books report that the proctor had searched for prostitutes in four terms; 'item pro inquirendis vagabundis et scortis quator terminis, xv^s vj^d'.[266] However, in 1522, the accounts refer to the women as *meretrices*; 'item ad magistrum Worsdayll agentem vices senioris procuratoris pro investigandis vagabundis et meretrices duabus noctibus, $viii^s$ x^d'.[267] Both terms, *meretrix* and *scortis*, show that these women were believed to be professional prostitutes, although their punishments are not listed. When professional prostitutes were found in 1533, they were expelled from the university, although no further punishment was recorded.[268]

Overall, the *Grace Books* indicate that searches for prostitutes became more frequent from 1520 to 1544. I have collated the evidence into the below table which shows that the number of inquisitions greatly increased after 1511. The evidence collated includes searches for vagabonds, night-wanderers, evil-doers and prostitutes, and includes the expenses for these, which ranged from 3d to 10s for a single search, and twice the annual year's expenses were recorded as 26s 8d. Interestingly the increase in searches coincides with Thomas Cromwell's chancellorship of the university. This increase may merely be because more accounts from this period have survived, or may have reflected Cromwell's keenness for seeking out immoral behaviour. It is true that Cromwell was chancellor of the university during the years of Reformation between 1535 and 1540 and had to deal with much unrest at the university, for example from Lollard sympathisers. Because of this, he may have felt the need to increase inquisitions into morality in the town.[269] The evidence is further problematic because of the use of language, as 'prostitutes' or 'escorts' were not named separately from vagabonds until 1521, although the numerous searches for vagabonds in previous years undoubtedly came across suspect women.

[265] Ibid., p. 159 and p. 251.
[266] *Grace Book B, Part II*, p. 69 and p. 100.
[267] Ibid., p. 107. See also pp. 128 and 152.
[268] Ibid., p. 181.
[269] G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 3-8.

Table 1: Number of searches for prostitutes, and cost, in Cambridge, 1454-1544. From *Grace Book A and B* (1897-1905)

	Grace Book A 1454-1488	Grace Book B, part I 1488-1511	Grace Book B, part II 1511-1544
Searches in town and around the university	1485/6- 2 searches	1488- 1 search, 18d 1490- 2 searches, 16d 1493- 1 search, 6d 1494-98- 2 searches, 7s 1499- 4 nights, 16d 1500/1- 1 search, 2s 1510- full year= 26s, 8d	1511/12- full year= 26s 8d 1514/5, 1 search, 12d 1514/5- 9 searches, 7s 1516-7, 1 search, 10d 1516/7, 1 search, 8d 1518/9- 1 search, 10s 1521/2- 3 searches, 15s, 6d 1522/3- 5 searches 17s, 2d 1533/4- 1 search, 8d
Searches at Barnwell		1505/6- 1 search	1523/4, 2 searches, 3d 1535/6- 5 searches, 2s 10d
Searches at the fairs		1505/6, 1 search, 20d 1507/8, 1 search, 2s	1517/8- 1 search, 5s 1518- 1 search, 10s 1519- 1 search, 10s 1527/8, 1 search, 10s 1537/8- 1 search, 3s, 6d

Students caught with prostitutes could be fined, ejected from their college or imprisoned, though the latter was unlikely.[270] The question of punishment further aggravated the 'town and gown' disputes within the town, as the university itself had no prison, and therefore depended upon the cooperation of the townspeople to provide lodging for those under the university chancellor's jurisdiction who were punished with imprisonment.

Those who had hoped that the chancellor's jurisdiction in the town would decline in time were sadly mistaken. Indeed, in 1561, Elizabeth I granted a charter confirming the chancellor's right to arrest women suspected of evil, and in 1603 James I allowed the university the right to have its own prison. In 1627, Thomas Hobson founded 'Hobsons Bridewell', which soon became known as the 'Spinning House'. It was designed to hold poor townsfolk, petty criminals and prostitutes.[271] By the 1820s, the house was being used solely as the chancellor's prison for streetwalkers. The power of the university chancellor to banish or arrest prostitutes was upheld for almost five hundred years, until the 1890s. Although this form of punishment was not available to the university chancellor in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is unquestionable that from 1317 to 1894, when the Spinning House was officially closed, the university chancellor held enormous jurisdiction over not just the moral standing of his students, but also the lives of the women who lived in Cambridge. Even in comparison to Oxford, it seems that the chancellor of Cambridge had an unparalleled level of power. [272]

As the church continuously condemned illicit sexuality, ecclesiastical courts in Cambridgeshire punished questionable characters. The church courts used a mixture of public display and confession, followed by an admission of guilt and apology to either the minister or full congregation. Those who refused could risk being excommunicated. Agnes Black, accused of being an unwed mother in Fen Ditton, to the north east of the

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[270] The proctors continued to eject scholars from the University of Cambridge for engaging in prostitution well into the nineteenth century. For an interesting argument between the chancellors and proctors on how to deal with a scholar that had been found in a house of 'ill fame' with lewd women, see 'Correspondence between the Vice-Chancellor and the Late Pro-proctors, relative to the proceedings in a recent case of Immorality', in *On the Draft of the Proposed New Statutes for Trinity College, Cambridge*, ed. by G. B. Airy (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co. 1859), pp. 1-20.

[271] The conditions in the house were particularly bad: in 1776 Dr Ewin visited the house and complained that there was no fire, bedsteads or a sewer, and it 1779 an outbreak of fever killed two or three women. Those who tried to escape could be flogged by the town crier. See *VCH*, *A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p. 121.

[272] In 1891, the re-arrest of a girl who had escaped led to public outcry against the university officials, and in 1894 the 'Cambridge University and Corporation Act' finally put an end to the vice chancellors' jurisdiction over prostitutes and made the police responsible for arrest. For more on this, see *VCH*, *A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely,* III, p. 78.

town, near Stourbridge, in 1593, was told to perform penance in the parish church 'clothed in a white sheete downe to the grounde'. Agnes was to stand in this sheet, with a 'white wande' in her hand at the entrance of the church for three Sundays from morning prayers until the 'readinge of the seconde lesson, desiring the people that passe into the churche to praie to God for her… at which time the minister there shall come down to this penitent and fetch her into the churche, reading the psalm of Misère in Englishe, and place her in the middle alley a-parte from other people'.[273] Agnes was to be humiliatingly singled out amongst her neighbours in the middle aisle of the church whilst the minister read out the Ten Commandments, after which she was to make an open confession of her sins for all to hear. The use of penance, public shame as punishment, and the white sheet shown here, was used at the mercy of the parish minister in an attempt to show the accused's purification. Furthermore, it represents a wider medieval trend to publicly show when a woman had engaged in illicit sexual behaviour by wearing distinctive clothing.[274] As will be discussed below, medieval town authorities in the fourteenth century (such as in Great Yarmouth), sometimes forced prostitutes to wear striped hoods to differentiate them from 'respectable' women, and banned them from wearing other items, such as fur. The distinctive role clothing could play in highlighting a woman's perceived sexual deviance therefore evolved over time, but in both instances was used to highlight the women as sexually immoral.

Lower level ecclesiastics could also take responsibility for punishing illicit sexual behaviour. In his work on jurisdiction in late medieval England, Lawrence Poos recorded cases where lower ecclesiastical courts took charge of punishing parishioners. Poos researched the courts of the dean and chapter of Lincoln from 1336 to1349 and also looked at Wisbech, a market town in the fens of Cambridgeshire, for the period 1458-1484. Wisbech was outside the chancellor's control and does not appear in the Visitations of the bishops of Lincoln, so cases of adultery and sexually promiscuous behaviour fell to the lower ecclesiastical courts. Poos uncovered a number of cases of promiscuity between 1469 and 1472 in Wisbech, which revealed that those accused of adultery would be expected to purge themselves: 'Robertus Medylton notatur de crimine adulterij cum Margareta Spynner. Negavit articulum et legitime se purgavit.'[275] Often cases of adultery, even where the defendant denied the claims brought against

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[273] A. B. Gray, *Cambridge Revisited* (Cambridge: Patrick Stephens Ltd, 1974), pp.134-5.
[274] See Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 21-22.
[275] L. R. Poos, ed. *Lower Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in Late Medieval England; the Courts of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln, 1336-1349 and the Deanery of Wisbech, 1458-1484* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 270.

them, resulted in purging or cleansing. Purging was a common form of punishment, and was used in cases of adultery and defamation alike.[276]

Presentments made before the justices of peace in June 1474 show that enquiries were being made about promiscuity and immorality within the town, regardless of marital status or gender. Joan George, recorded as 'a housewife of Cambridge', was accused of keeping her house open at 'unlawful times' and receiving 'dishonest persons by night'. Additionally, Joan Mast, also recorded as a housewife of Cambridge, was accused of doing the same between 6 May and 4 June. Thomas Miller, a labourer also of Cambridge, was accused likewise of these crimes. Mast and Miller were probably either procuring prostitutes for others or themselves engaging in illicit sexual activity, whereas it seems that Joan George (with the help of her husband) was running a small-scale brothel. Joan was accused for a second time, alongside her husband Kendall, of running a small-scale bawdy house. The presentment claimed that they 'kept [an] open house at unreasonable times, and lodged certain strumpets and other persons of evil government, to the great disturbance of their neighbours'. Unfortunately, it does not state where the couple lived within Cambridge, and sadly the records of the punishments for these presentments have not survived.[277]

Sometimes single women and men acted together; from the 10 April to 6 June 1474, two women, Margaret Hawkesley, a widow, and Katharine Diche, were accused together of receiving and lodging strumpets, thieves, 'and other persons of evil condition'. Although we cannot be certain of the relationship between the two women, it seems likely that Margaret and Katherine were running a small-scale brothel, procuring women and allowing sexual activity to take place in their residence, although again the location of this house is not noted.[278]

Much like Oxford, these presentments suggest that 'brothels' or 'bawdy houses' within Cambridge were small and domestically run, either by a couple or by women living together who likely would have themselves worked in the sex trade. Interestingly, the source presents Joan Mast only as a housewife of Cambridge but mentioned nothing of her husband. It seems unlikely that her husband would not have noticed illicit sexual activity taking place within his own house, which suggests that he was believed not to

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[276] Poos reports many cases of adultery in Wisbech. Although these are interesting, I see little benefit including his findings here as this information is published and predominately for a town outside of Cambridge. See for example Poos, pp. 277, 281-2 and 286.
[277] *Annals of Cambridge,* I, pp. 220-221.
[278] Ibid., p. 221.

have been involved. As two of the six named defendants were men, it is clear that procuration was believed to be a vice of both genders, although this does not mean that any of the people involved were acting as procurers or indeed ever involved in prostitution. Instead, these may simply have been defamatory accusations made by unfriendly neighbours.

Conclusions from Cambridge

Illicit sexuality in Cambridge was monitored and suppressed by town, gown and church alike. As in Oxford, the university chancellor of Cambridge had huge jurisdiction in the town and held enormous power not only over the scholars, but also over women and men living in the town. This is shown by the chancellor's frequent inquisitions, the Spinning House, and by searches conducted outside of the chancellor's jurisdiction in Barnwell. Alongside the university authorities, searches could be conducted by the mayor, bailiffs and sheriffs and by members of the church. Visitations by the bishops of Lincoln focused on illicit sexual activity amongst the friars, nunneries and monks and between parishioners. Although miscreants could face excommunication or confinement, the most common form of punishment was purging, and as the case of Agnes Black shows, this could be extremely humiliating. Women placed in the Spinning House could face disease or worse, although most 'common women' found were simply banished from the town. Like Oxford, the scholars of Cambridge were expected to maintain a strict barrier between themselves and temptations in the town, and those caught engaging in illicit sexual activity could be fined or expelled, although all punishments remained at the discretion of the chancellor.

Although no *Gropecunt Lane* existed in Cambridge, a topographical study indicates that there were still specific areas associated with illicit sex. Prostitutes were drawn to Stourbridge during the fair, though they were constantly searched out and ran the risk of being condemned, banned and punished. Of course, the search for illicit sexual activity was not restricted to professional prostitutes. Overall, the evidence from Cambridge shows similar patterns of illicit sexual activity to those of Oxford; the presentments indicate small-scale bawdy houses rather than established brothels, which mimicked the 'bordellos' found on the continent, and women accused of soliciting could be banished from the town, fined or imprisoned. Unlike Oxford however, the

majority of the evidence for Cambridge suggests that illicit sex took place away from the town centre, away from where the chancellor held jurisdiction, instead taking place on the outskirts and in the suburbs. It is evident that the proctors found illicit sex within the town walls, referring to these women only as 'housewives', without noting their address. Women were also found liaising with students in King's College, and prostitutes must have been soliciting near the university buildings for the chancellors to be so concerned to condemn it. However, the *Grace Books* and visitations shed light on other areas such as Fen Ditton, Barnwell and neighbouring villages, which were all outside the town walls, to the north of the town. In this way, Cambridge differed somewhat from Oxford, and illicit sex here may be seen as more 'marginal', perhaps because the university chancellor in Cambridge was so powerful.

3. CATHEDRAL TOWNS

The evidence from Oxford and Cambridge reveals that clerics were involved in illicit sex. The evidence from these towns further encourages the idea that illicit sexual conduct was prevalent amongst supposedly celibate members of the church. Other historical research into cathedral towns also supports the argument that the town clergy were engaging in illicit sex. In the cathedral town of Winchester for example, evidence from 1330-1460 indicates that prostitution and brothels were commonplace. Prostitution was never institutionalised in Winchester, despite the Bishop of Winchester having a vested interest in the Southwark stew houses. In his survey of medieval Winchester, Derek Keene notes that prostitutes presented to the town court up to 1400 were seen as 'unfit' to reside in the town, and were therefore banished or threatened with the pillory if they did not comply. After 1400, this punishment was dropped in favour of fines, the commonest of which was 6d. Overall, Keene concludes that the evidence drawn from the brothels is particularly 'damaging for the clergy', as the clients of these brothels commonly included monks, priests, friars, married men and wives, alongside men of ill-fame. Keene further notes that the priests and friars were occasionally mentioned by name.[279] In Salisbury too, town authorities attempted to prevent clerical sex and regulate prostitution. In 1387, a complaint was made to the dean and chapter about a vicar choral who had been 'consorting with women of ill repute', and in the mid fifteenth century, the town authorities attempted to regulate prostitution by ordering that all prostitutes in Salisbury should wear striped gowns.[280] As will be discussed in regards to Great Yarmouth, distinctive clothing was used to ensure that prostitutes were differentiated from respectable women, but it would also have made it more difficult for the town's clergy to engage in secret sexual relations with them.

With this in mind, it seems a comparative study of cathedral towns may be useful, which is why I have chosen to look at the cathedral towns of Norwich and

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[279] D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester, Part I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 390-391. Keene notes that after 1400 fines were the preferred form of punishment, with 6d being the most common fine - the same amount fined for minor sanitary offences. See pp. 390-392.

[280] Andrew D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury, 1250-1550* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 181 and p. 15. Brown also notes that the Holy Trinity hospital was set up on the site of an apparently notorious brothel, p. 181.

Hereford next. Both rank highly in the 1377 Poll Tax, would be considered comparable to the towns discussed above in terms of size, and were dominated by a cathedral, which is why I have chosen to look at the evidence from these towns together. In addition to this, both towns have sexually notorious *Gropecunt Lanes*. In Hereford, the street was a surprisingly large road in comparison to the small alleyways of Oxford and Norwich. This is uncommon, and may in part be because of the county gaol, located on the street. Evidence from both fifteenth century Hereford and Norwich is particularly good. Many of the ecclesiastical registers taken by the bishops of Hereford have survived, and the register of Bishop Richard Beauchamp, although short, provides an interesting insight into clerical adultery. Up to now, analysis of sexual behaviour in Norwich has focused predominately on the connection between misconduct and public health. Karras mentions Norwich, but states only that the authorities in Norwich expelled prostitutes from the town in 1312, which is shown in the leet court rolls. Carole Rawcliffe's extensive works on medieval Norwich have shed more light on sexual misconduct and prostitution, but she focuses on its importance for public health.[281]

Hereford and Norwich: An introduction

Hereford ranked twenty-first in the 1377 Poll Tax, with 1,903 recorded tax payers.[282] It was certainly smaller than Norwich, and was much closer in size to Cambridge. Hereford became prosperous during the fifteenth century, as the English wool trade grew and demand for wool from Leominster expanded, because it was thought of as the best wool in England, which allowed Hereford to stay thriving despite spells of plague.[283] The town traded with Wales and the Marshes, London, Gloucester, Bristol and Chester.[284] Furthermore, pilgrimage to the tomb of Thomas of Cantilupe, and the bishop's annual seven day fair, enriched innkeepers and tradesmen alike and encouraged employment, building and expansion in the fourteenth century.[285] However, Hereford's close proximity to Wales meant that throughout the 1400s, the town had to deal with wars and invasions from the Welsh, and there was particular turbulence between 1401 and 1409.[286] Although Hereford castle was thought to be one of the largest in England (with the court sitting there in 1452 and 1457), it appears to

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[281] For example, Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*.
[282] Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).
[283] *VCH*, *Herefordshire*, I, p. 408.
[284] M. D. Lobel, ed. *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800, Vol I* (London: Lovell Johns, 1969), p. 7.
[285] Ibid., p. 8.
[286] *VCH*, *Herefordshire*, I, pp. 368-371.

have lost its military importance by the end of the fifteenth century.[287] Finally, Hereford was divided into five wards, each named after the five gates of the town, and had a stock in the town's marketplace for punishment.

The 1334 subsidy suggests that, in the first half of the fourteenth century, Norwich was ranked among the top ten wealthiest towns in England.[288] However, in the second half of the fourteenth century, recurrent bouts of plague and a fall in immigration greatly reduced the population. Elizabeth Rutledge estimates that the population may have reduced from 25,000 people to 8,000.[289] Despite this, it was the fifth largest town in England according to the 1377 Poll Tax, with a recorded 3,952 taxpayers, and the 1400s saw a surge in building work, with attempts to make the town a much cleaner place to live.[290] Additionally, Norwich was a town of orchards and open spaces, which could easily be used for illicit romantic encounters. Little development happened outside of the town walls prior to 1800 and, unlike Cambridge, there was little in the way of suburbs surrounding Norwich. Through Norwich ran the river Wensum, though due to lack of cleanliness, Rutledge estimates that the population at large and the religious institutions would have got most of their drinking water from local wells.[291] Finally, the town had four leet courts which took charge of its administrative functions; these consisted of Conesford in the south east, Mancroft in the south west, Westwyk across the centre and Ultra-Aquam across the river Wensum in the northern part of the town.

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[287] Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800*, pp. 7-9.

[288] Catherine Casson, 'Reputation and Responsibility in Medieval English Towns: Civic Concerns with the Regulations of Trade.' *Urban History*, 39 (2012), pp. 387-408 (p. 391).

[289] Elizabeth Rutledge, 'An Urban Environment: Norwich in the Fifteenth Century' in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by Linda Clarke and Carole Rawcliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 79-100 (p. 80).

[290] Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).

[291] Rutledge, 'An Urban Environment: Norwich in the Fifteenth Century' in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by Clarke and Rawcliffe, pp. 79-100 (p. 86).

A topographical study: did certain streets in Hereford and Norwich attract illicit sex?

Norwich: Gropecunt Lane

Like Oxford, medieval Norwich had a *Gropecunt Lane*. It was later renamed *Opie Street* (which it is still called today), but was sometimes referred to as *Turpis Vicus*, meaning 'wicked' or 'foul' street, in the middle ages. Rutledge notes that 'prostitution seems to have centred on a lane east of St Andrew's Hill in the leet of Wymer. This was known as Gropecunte Lane or *Turpis Vicus*… the removal of certain common prostitutes from the area caused affray in 1313.'[292] The lane ran from the castle ditch in the leet of Westwyk to Pottergate Street to Wymer Street and was located in the centre of the town, in St Andrew's parish. It was close to the market, with easy access to the cathedral and further surrounded by the imposing Dominican friary and several other friaries and churches, shown in the map below.[293] Maps from 1550 held in the Norfolk Record Office show that the lane lay to the north of the castle and was therefore right in the commercial centre of the town. Additionally in 1397, a site on the north side of the market was made into a 'Common Inn' by the municipality, who requested all strangers and travellers to stay there.[294] This would have been little more than a five minute walk from *Gropecunt Lane*, and can only have further encouraged sexually-minded travellers. As travellers and market goers undoubtedly made up a large proportion of prostitutes' clientele, it is likely that prostitutes congregated here. Overall, this was a heavily built up, busy area, although the street itself appears to have been little more than an alley, easily accessible to travellers, clerics and tradesmen alike and perfect for private liaisons, like *Grope Lane* in Oxford.

John Kirkpatrick, a local antiquary writing in the late seventeenth century, compiled an extensive collection of working notes on the streets and lanes of Norwich. A Victorian edition of these notes includes a copy of Thomas Cleer's map of Norwich, published in 1696, during Kirkpatrick's lifetime, and both allude to *Gropecunte Lane's* notoriety. Of the lane's orientation, Kirkpatrick wrote: 'then a little further East there was a lane (which is now stopped up) running South up to Cuttlerowe… called in Latine

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[292] E. Rutledge, 'Norwich before the Black Death' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 157-189 (p. 182).
[293] *NRO*, MC 146/52, plans 73, 76 and 72.
[294] James Campbell, *Historic Towns, Norwich, Vol 2*, ed. by M. D. Lobel and W. H. Johns (London: The Scolar Press, 1975), p. 15.

in the Records & Rolls of the Cathedral Church by the name of *Turpis Vicus* [foul street].' Predictably, when editing the text in the 1880s, William Henry Hudson, an Anglican cleric, felt that the lane was best left unmentioned and frustratingly stops the translation there, including in a footnote the explanation: 'a few lines are here omitted relating to the name by which this lane was popularly described in medieval language, from the earliest times down to as late as Henry VII. Its Latin title is sufficient for identification. It ran along the line of Opie Street from the Castle Ditch, by the County Police Station, right through to Pottergate Street.'[295] Somewhat disappointingly, the original passage in Kirkpatrick's handwritten notes also seems to be missing. Although he mentions the area directly around *Gropecunt Lane*, St Andrew's parish and the market, references to Opie Street, Turpis Vicus and *Gropecunt Lane* are omitted entirely, so whatever he meant to say about the lane has since been lost or destroyed.[296]

Norwich: Other illicit areas

Alongside *Gropecunte Lane*, Norwich also had another possibly sexually infamous street: *Whores Lane*. Originally referred to as *St Martin's Lane*, the street became popularly known as *Whores Lane* sometime after 1330.[297] The street was situated close to St Martin's church, with easy access to *Coselanye*, a major road which ran towards the north east of the town, ended by St Martin's Gate in the town wall (see map below). In his work on the antiquities of Norwich in the 1700s, Charles Parkin mentioned the parsonage at St Mary in Coslany, saying that its garden was 'very extensive and abutted on Whore's Lane North.'[298] Additionally, Kirkpatrick discussed the lane, writing 'the next lane which runs East along the North side of St Martin's church, and beyond it falling in to the pit street a little southward from the late Churchyard of St Olave; This They called Hor Lane… Le Horlane… Horelane…paid for making a channel in ye Lane that lede from St Olave's church to St Marteyn's at Oke to convey the water out of St Olave's street to the cockey in St Marteyn's aforesaide, 2s.'[299] Although Hudson did not hide the name of this lane in his work as he

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[295] John Kirkpatrick, *The Streets and Lanes of the City of Norwich*, ed. by W. Hudson (Norwich: Agas Goose for the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society, 1889), p. 59.

[296] *NRO*, BOL 4/22.

[297] Campbell, p. 25.

[298] Charles Parkin, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Norwich in the County of Norfolk Collected from Antient Records and Other Authentic Materials* (Lynn: W. Whittingham, 1783), p. 291. Blomefield likewise discusses the parsonage house, saying that the garden was not far from the north side of the churchyard and commenting that the houses which stood between them belonged to Caius College, Cambridge, which possibly included *Whores Lane*. See Francis Blomefield, *The History of the City and County of Norwich* (Norwich, 1745), p. 841.

[299] Kirkpatrick, p. 74.

did with *Gropecunt Lane*, the lane itself is one of the few not mentioned in his index and it is possible that he made this decision in a deliberate attempt not to draw attention to the name. Modern historians are undecided about the origin of the name of this street, however. Fiona Williamson argues that 'St Martin's Lane just north of the river was colloquially dubbed *Whores Lane* after its nocturnal goings on', which reflects the evolution of other street names in medieval English towns.[300]

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[300] Fiona Williamson, *Social Relations and Urban Space: Norwich 1600-1700* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), p. 84.

Map of Medieval Norwich, showing the location of the illicit sexualised streets of Grope Lane, Hor Lane and Ber Street, and the gates which allowed access to these. From *Elizabeth Rutledge, 'An Urban Environment: Norwich in the Fifteenth Century' in* The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by Linda Clarke and Carole Rawcliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 79-100 (p. 95)*
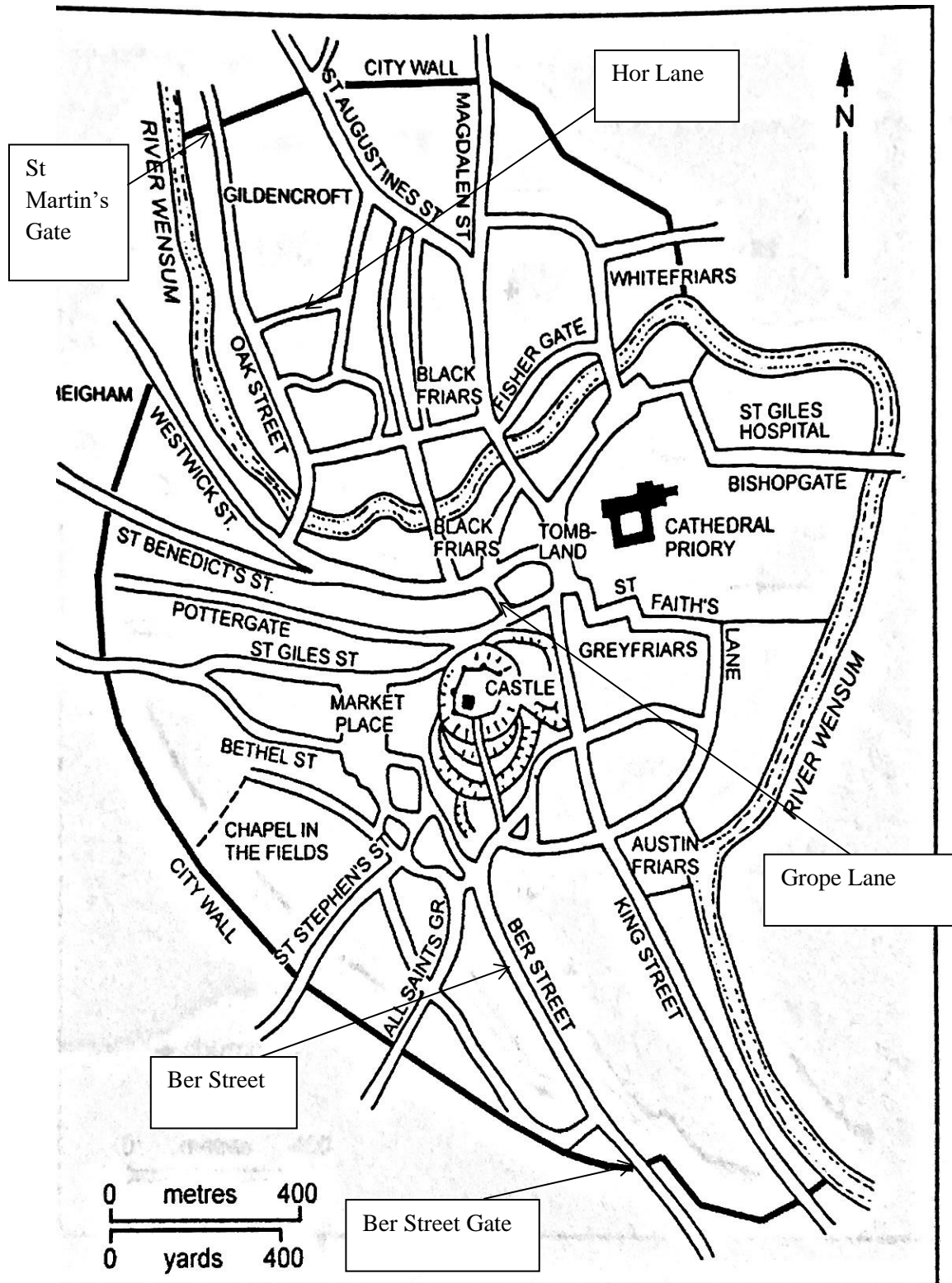
Whilst this would make sense, there is a possible second reason for the name *Whores Lane*, as it may have been named after 'Margery Hore'. This surname does not appear to have been common, and only one other example is discussed in this thesis. In his work on Norwich in the 1700s, Francis Blomefield also made the connection to prostitution, although he believed he had evidence that the street was named after Margery Hore, who alongside Vicar Thomas Atkin, both from Suffolk, had given Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, the sum of £48 to purchase land in 1540, and, so, this street, belonging to that college, had been named after Margery. He argued that it was spelt 'hore' as a dialectical variation on 'hire' as incontinent women hired out their bodies, but because Margery herself was Dutch and in the Netherlands the word was pronounced 'hoor' the road had taken the name 'whore'.[301] He includes this interesting theory in a section on Coslany Ward, which was where *Whores Lane* was found, although his theory does not necessarily mean any illicit activity actually took place there. Additionally, it begs the question of how far Margery herself must have been elevated in society, from a common prostitute to a wealthy woman who had a street in a different country named after her. The interesting addition of Thomas Atkin calls into question whether perhaps Margery was simply his long term partner, named as a prostitute by society, or whether Atkin had redeemed her from a life of sin.

In his work on place names in Norfolk, Karl Sandred discusses the confusing origins of *Whores Lane*, arguing that it may have simply meant 'dirty lane' from the old English *Horu* meaning 'filth'. His research suggests two further possible reasons for the name - either that the lane was particularly dirty because of tanneries located here, or that *har* came to mean 'boundary' and the lane only became *Whores Lane* in popular eighteenth century etymology.[302] Neither Hudson nor Kirkpatrick give any reasons for the name of the street, perhaps because Kirkpatrick was also unsure and Hudson felt no need to question it and illuminate possible illicit sexual activity. Because of patchy evidence, it is impossible to know for certain either way; although we cannot rule out it being an infamous street, it may have been the case that the street was named after Miss Hore, and opportunistic sexually active individuals naturally began to gather there. Regardless, the records again demonstrate that these potential areas of illicit sexual activity were hardly marginal and were seemingly located within the town walls.

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[301] Blomefield, p. 844.
[302] Karl Sandred and Bengt Lindstrom, *The Place- Names of Norfolk, Part I: The Place Names of the City of Norwich, Vol 61* (Norwich: English Place Name Society, 1989), p. 130.

Hereford: Gropecunt Lane

Hereford too had a *Gropecunt Lane*. Gaol Street, formerly *Gropecunt Lane*, was a planned lane that serviced a series of St Owen street plots, near to the town wall, in the late twelfth century.[303] The street was located in the north east of the town, with the town's gaol located about halfway down the street.[304] This too was uncommon, as although other towns had stocks and pillories near sexualised streets, Hereford stands alone (among the towns studied in this thesis) in having a gaol located on *Gropecunt Lane*, and this may have been a deliberate attempt to prevent illicit sex taking place there. Although it is unclear when the name *Gropecunt Lane* was first used, it was certainly being used by the late thirteenth century, and the street was last recorded as *Grope Lane* in 1844, when part of the gaol was rebuilt. Unlike such lanes in other towns (with the exception of Oxford, and as will be discussed, Shrewsbury), the street was not completely renamed in the seventeenth century, although it does seem to have lost the ending *cunt*. The street ran from the market place to the town wall and was near one of the town's main gates, whilst the nearest church was St Peter's. Additionally, it differed significantly from other areas because of its size (see maps below). In Hereford, *Gropecunt Lane* was relatively large, and does not appear to have functioned as an 'alley' or 'dark lane' for lovers, and so would not have provided privacy. Even so, Baker believes that it would have attracted prostitutes as a result of its proximity to the market, arguing that 'the street name, Grope Lane, in conjunction with the spatial relationship of the lane to the High Town markets area, also makes it fairly clear that this was a centre of medieval prostitution.'[305]

Baker's conclusion seems likely. This was certainly reflective of *Grope Lanes* in other towns, as although the lanes in Oxford and Norwich were smaller, the trend indicates that these roads regularly developed near to the towns' busy market areas, allowing the prostitutes working there to pick up clients with ready money easily, such as tradesmen and visitors to the market. Furthermore, it would mimic other streets in Hereford that were named after the activities or occupations that took place there, such as the butchers on *Butchers Row*, cooks on *Cooken Row*, craftsmen on *Corresers Row* and *Sadelwrites Street*, mercers on *Mercer's Row* and canons on *Caboche Lane* (later

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[303] Nigel Baker, 'A Characterisation of the Historic Townscape of Central Herefordshire', in *Herefordshire Archaeology Report*, 266 (2010), 1-39 (p.19).
[304] It is unclear when this gaol was built, but a new county gaol was sanctioned in 1776. See Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800*, pp. 7-9.
[305] Baker, 'A Characterisation of the Historic Townscape of Central Herefordshire', 1-39 (p.12)

known as *Capuchin Lane*), which ran directly to the cathedral precinct, meaning that the canons would have easy access to both the market place and *Gropecunt Lane*.[306]

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[306] Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800,* p. 6.

Map of Medieval Hereford, demonstrating the north eastern location of the market and Grope Lane. From Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800*, Vol I (London: Lovell Johns, 1969)
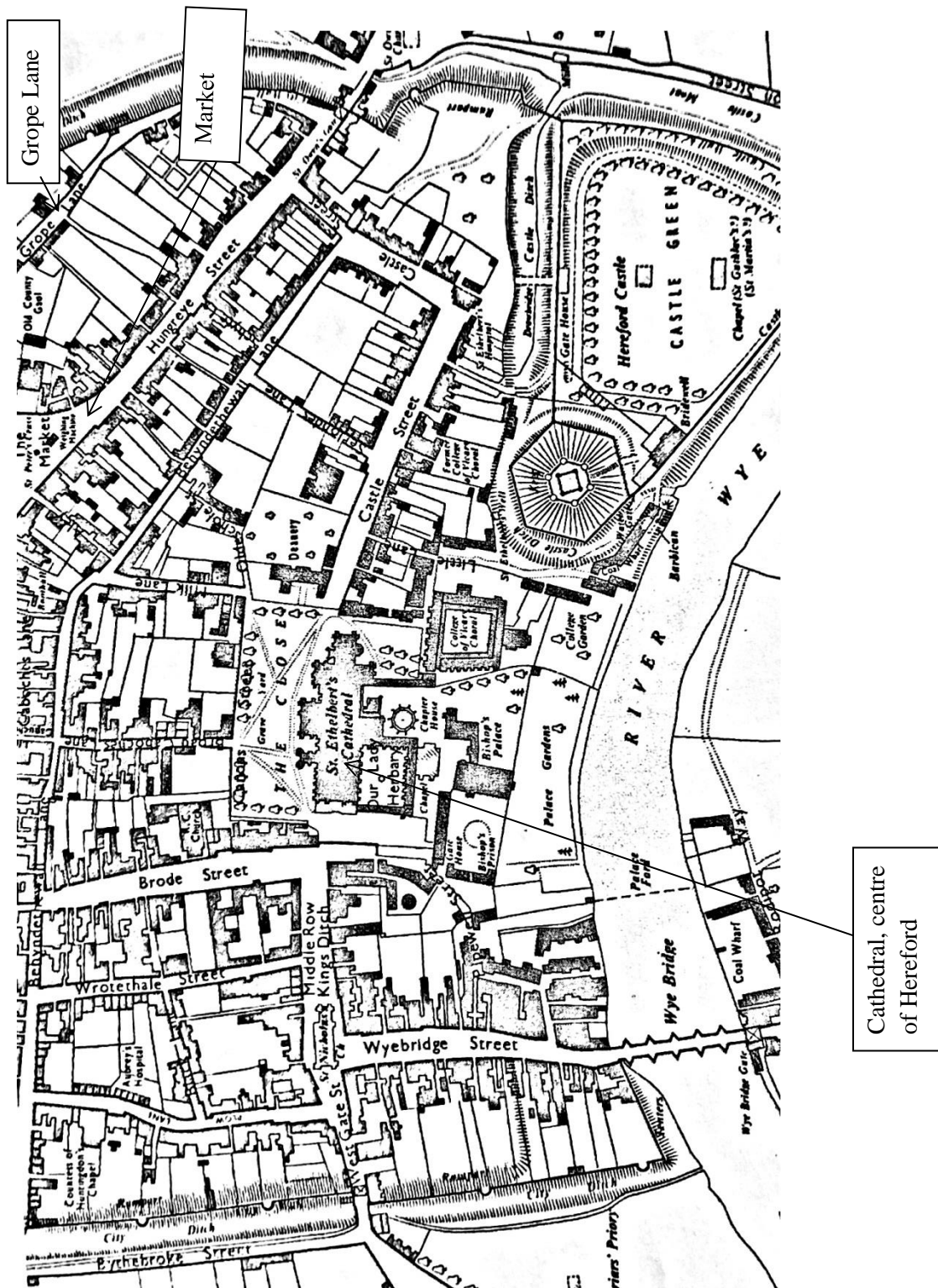
Close up showing the location of Grope Lane, signifying its large size, the prevalence of the gaol, and its close proximity to the market. Ibid.
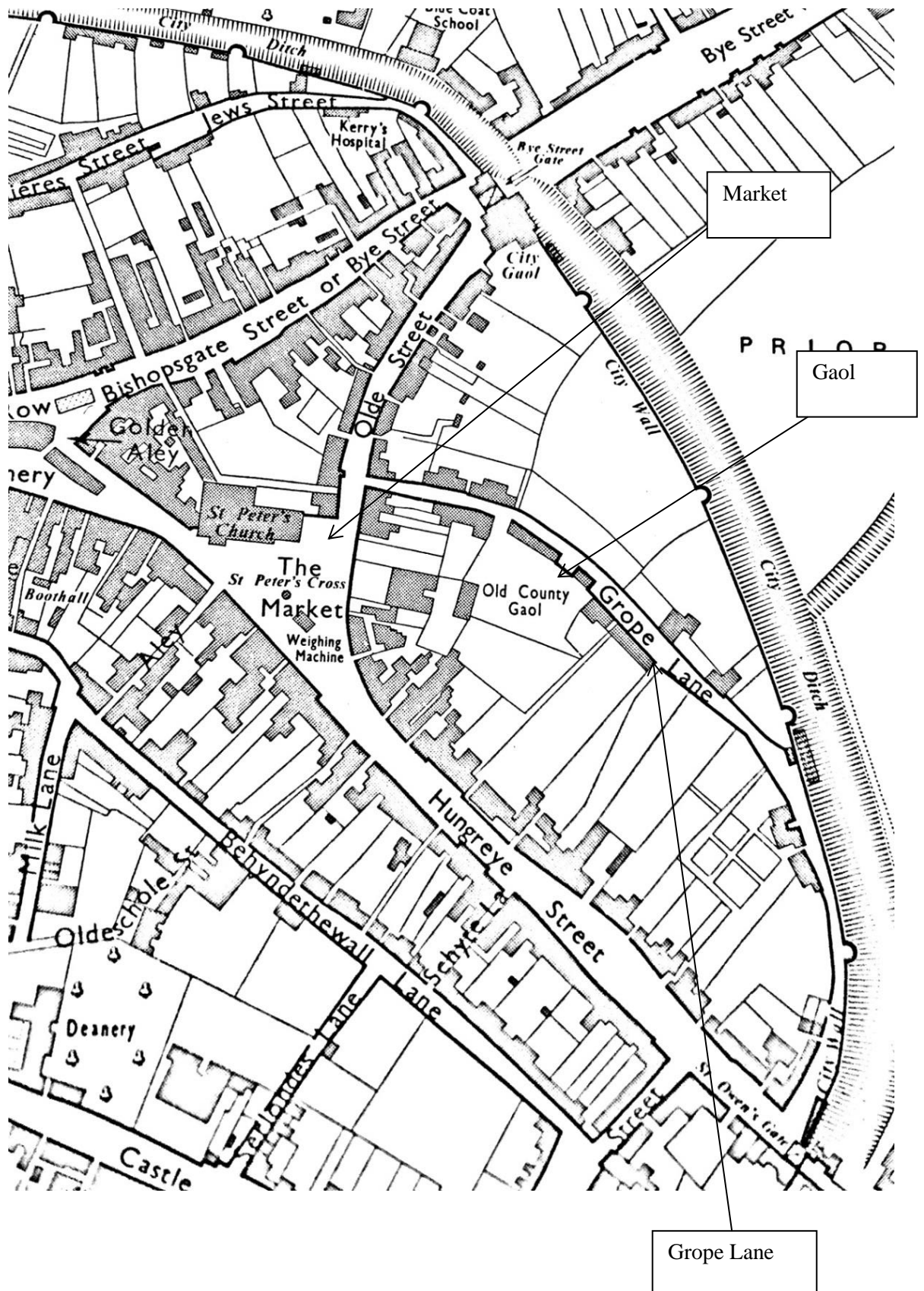
What does the evidence suggest about the types of illicit sex in Norwich and Hereford and where this was taking place?

Norwich: Evidence from the Leet Courts

Inquisitions concerning sexual behaviour in Norwich were presided over by the leet courts. In her work *Controlling Misbehavior*, Marjorie McIntosh looked at how separate judicial and ecclesiastical authorities dealt with regulating and investigating sexual activity. Her evidence showed that sessions of the peace also dealt with cases of night walking, but as interest in extramarital sex grew in the fifteenth century, they added sexual problems, alehouses and vagabonds to the offences they dealt with.[307] Concern grew in the years immediately preceding the Reformation, as Cromwell's parliament tried to establish more effective national control. As has previously been said, this increased interest in sex by Cromwell was displayed during his time as chancellor of Cambridge University, between 1535 and 1540.[308] Mostly, local jurors left cases of fornication and adultery to the ecclesiastical courts; as McIntosh points out, those that did deal with cases of sexual misconduct were on dangerous ground, as the church, not judicial courts, had jurisdiction in these cases. Despite this, it is evident that jurors in Norwich did investigate sexual activity.

Norwich was split into four leet courts, presided over by a bailiff. These courts were tasked with presenting crimes and were made up of spokesmen, constables, sub-constables and collectors of amercements.[309] These lesser courts confronted both female and male perpetrators, as local jurors were not primarily concerned with female sexuality but instead with regulating all sexual behaviour regardless of gender.[310]

For the surviving records from the leet courts from 1287 to 1550/1, edited by Hudson and published in the nineteenth century, evidence of adultery and sexual promiscuity appeared in only five separate years and was evidentially in the minority of complaints brought forward to the leet courts of Norwich. Those that have survived do not always record the punishments, and at least one is ambiguous and may not indicate

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[307] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600*, p. 32.
[308] See previous chapter on Cambridge.
[309] Philippa Maddern, 'Order and Disorder' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 189- 212 (p. 192). For more on how the leet courts were set up, see pp. 191- 194.
[310] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* pp. 73-4. For more on this see graph 3.5 'Courts that reported sexual misconduct: percentage of presentments by gender'.

any sexual contact whatsoever. In her research of cases brought before the leet courts between 1288 and 1391, Philippa Maddern identified 7.4% of cases of moral and social disorder, which included only nine accusations of night walking.[311]

Some of those brought before the leet courts were accused with rape. The first case of sexual misconduct was reported in the Conesford leet roll in 1287-8. The roll records that 'Richard de Hemenhale [defiled] and raped Hawise Balle', in the sub-leet of *Berstrette*, or *Ber Street*, which was a major road running from the castle perimeter to the south east of the town. The name may have indicated that female brewers resided there, and the street would time and again be associated with illicit sex. Hudson edited the records in the nineteenth century, and despite his attempts to hide *Gropecunt Lane*, interestingly he did not try to desexualise the text, and even includes a footnote which clearly says that 'the middle of this word is defaced', but he concludes that it is most likely *stupravit*, meaning to 'defile'.[312] Sadly, any punishment or fine was not recorded. A second case reported in 1299-1300, in the leet of Nedham and Mancroft, to the south west of the castle within the town walls, told that Richard de Berton 'carried off [rapuit] the wife of William Steadfast with her husband's goods.'[313] This case is somewhat ambiguous, as although the record uses the term *rapuit*, Hudson translates it here as 'carried off' rather than 'raped', because she was taken away with her husband's property, which could mean no sexual crime was committed, and Richard was simply interested in the goods, or that she willingly went with him and was in on the plan. Although women could sue over rape, the case tells us little of punishment for sexual crime because (even if it was rape) the amount Richard was fined is missing.[314]

Prostitution and brothel-keeping also appear in the leet rolls, and in 1312-13 a noteworthy case was reported. William de Happisburgh was accused of assaulting Roger de Lopham, William Gerard and John of the Stonehouse, all bailiffs of Norwich, as they were driving prostitutes out of the town. It seems that Happisburgh attempted to rescue the girls from the bailiffs but was prevented from doing so and eventually

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[311] See Table 3, Maddern, 'Order and Disorder' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 189- 212 (p. 196).

[312] *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the 13th and 14th Centuries*, ed. by W. Hudson (London: The Seldon Society, 1892), p. 6.

[313] *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the 13th and 14th Centuries*, p. 52.

[314] Sara M. Butler, 'More than Mothers: Juries of Matrons and Pleas of the Belly in Medieval England', *Law and History Review*, 37 (2019), 353-396 (p. 354).

arrested, alongside John Dereday and John his brother, who had tried to help him.[315] The case was reported in the leet of Wymer and Westwyck, the location of *Gropecunt Lane*.[316] Hudson translates *meretrices* here as 'harlots', although the women might be better described by modern terminology as professional prostitutes, as expulsion from the town was rarely deployed as punishment for a first offence of sexually immorality, and the term 'harlot' could be confused with the modern day 'whore'.[317] This case highlights the fact that the public did not always respond well when authorities sought to punish apparent prostitutes. William, John and his brother's intervention to protect the women is most unusual, although it does mimic attempts by the townspeople of Cambridge to stop the authorities putting girls in Hobson's Bridewell. It indicates that there may have been real compassion for women accused of prostitution and a genuine concern for their welfare, perhaps as a result of the poverty that they are likely to have endured. As William and his brother were both arrested, it may also be the case that they had a personal relationship with one of the women being expelled, and knew that driving her outside the town walls would only have escalated her desperate situation further. Of course another, more pessimistic explanation, is that William and his brother were pimps, attempting to 'protect their property', although they are not named as pimps in the records.

Finally, in 1550/1, jurors of the Conesford leet complained that Robert Heywarde had a brothel on *Ber Street*, the street noted in 1287. They presented him 'for that he kipeth a bordall howse and suffer suspect persons to resorte to the same wherefor he is amercied… ijs. 2 persons for resorting thither…iijs.'[318] Topographically, *Ber Street* fits the same pattern that we find with other sexually illicit streets; it was frequented by travellers going to the market, and lay near the castle and several important churches, as well as leading directly to one of the town's main gates (Ber Street Gate), meaning anyone entering the town from the south east would pass these brothels, and the name's association with beer may mean that female brewers resided

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[315] *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the 13th and 14th Centuries*, pp. 58-9. It occurred to me that 'Happisburgh' may be the surname of an alien, although *Happisburgh* is also a small coastal town in Norfolk, so it is possible that William was a local man.

[316] Rutledge, 'Norwich before the Black Death' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 157-189 (p.182).

[317] As described previously, by 'professional prostitute' I mean women who sold sexual services for financial payment as their primary means of earning money, or where employed to work in municipally owned brothels.

[318] *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the 13th and 14th Centuries*, p. 87.

there.[319] As will be discussed, Colchester likewise had a *Ber Lane* that may have been associated with prostitution, also located in the southern part of the town.

Overall, sexual crimes reported to the leet courts of Norwich were not numerous. Of those discussed in this thesis, only two cases ended in arrest and only one provides full details of the fine paid.

Hereford: Evidence from the visitations

Visitations recorded in the thirteenth century in Hereford, also reported many accounts of adultery and fornication amongst parishioners and clergymen alike. Thanks to a practice of preserving visitation records in medieval Hereford, three records relating to visitations in the diocese in this period have survived, and have been studied by Ian Forrest and Christopher Whittick. The first visitation is recorded in 1284, with a second visitation taking place in 1286.The visitations reported many moral offences including adultery, fornication, concubinage, incest, sex with a servant, and domestic violence, in addition to both sorcery and witchcraft.[320]

Most of the cases reported discuss accusations of adultery in villages outside of Hereford, although not all the parishes are named, so some accusations may have been related to couples residing within the town walls. In one particular case, the punishment at least was set within the town, presumably to cause as much humiliation as possible. In 1286, the visitation found that in an unnamed parish, a man named Richard was accused of living publicly with Katherine, to whom he was not married, for which he received penitence as punishment, whilst she was forced to make a public proclamation in the church at Hereford.[321] A number of residents were further accused of adultery in the same parish; the visitation reported that Hugh, the servant of the dean of Hereford,

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[319] See R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 48, which states that the core word *ber* came from 'bere', a kind of barley, and was in use from 1271.

[320] I. Forrest and C. Whittick, 'The Thirteenth Century Visitation Records of the Diocese of Hereford', *English Historical Review*, 131, 551 (2016) 737- 762 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cew227> [accessed 11 July 2019], p. 743-4. During the visitation in 1284, Bishop Swinfield found domestic violence in four of the sixteen parishes, making domestic violence prevalent in one in four visitations. This figure is not complete as many more cases many never have been heard, although it is interesting that Swinfield was investigating violence against women, stating that the men did not treat their wives well; '*Willelmus le Vinour non tractat uxorem suam modo debito*' (p. 745). See also *Registrum Ricardi de Swinfield, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1283-1317* (Hereford: Wilson & Phillips, 1909).

[321] The name of the church is missing, Forrest and Whittick, p. 757. These residents may have come from Wellington Parish. See Forrest and Whittick, p. 744.

had committed adultery with Isabella le Pol, for which they were both purged, whilst Anabilia de Parco was excommunicated, again publicly in the church at Hereford.[322]

Hereford: Evidence from dispensation

The Supplications from England and Wales record dispensations between 1410 and 1503, and dispensations in Hereford are particularly revealing of unwed couples. Topographically, tracing these cases to Hereford's map meets a number of problems. Firstly, in the instance where children are requesting dispensation from parents, who would have been the perpetrators of illicit sex, names are not given, and the parents themselves may have come from other towns, as clerics may have moved to Hereford to further their own careers. However, there are instances where it seems likely that those requesting dispensation for illicit sexual activity resided in Hereford. In July 1490 for example, Thomas Hoke and his partner Elizabeth are noted as 'dwelling in Hereford', and it seems likely that other adulterous couples requesting dispensation from the church authorities would have lived in the town.[323] The second problem here is that for the couples that likely did live within the towns walls, we still cannot trace their exact addresses or establish if these were near *Gropecunt Lane*. Although this conclusion is frustrating, the supplications at least provide us with an interesting insight into some of the types of illicit sex happening in towns.

The *Supplications* clearly indicate historic and extensive cases of illicit sex within the town. Whilst these offer little topographical evidence, children who had resulted from illicit sex continued to request dispensation from parentage throughout the late 1400s, and as will be seen, punishments listed in registers in the 1420s and 1450 show that clerical sex continued to take place. Between 1460 and 1477, seven men requested dispensation from having unmarried parents.[324] This request could indicate that a young unmarried couple had a child, or that a couple simply believed themselves to already be married. The majority of these were scholars and priests who wished to be promoted to higher orders.[325] Between 1445 and 1446, three priests further sought dispensation having been born of a married man and a married woman, thereby having

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[322] Forrest and Whittick, p. 758. The names of Isabella's husband and Anabilia's lover are missing. Forrest and Whittick note that this is Hugh of Wellington, a clerk who had previously held the lands at Wellington within the episcopal manor of Ledbury, now held by Robert le Breton, also reported for adultery. It may therefore be the case that concerns about the behaviour of two important landowning families prompted cautious administration in Hereford preserving this fragment. See p. 746.

[323] *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, p. 362.

[324] *Supp AP, Vol I: 1410-1464*, p. 197 and p. 232.

[325] *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, pp. 73-5, and p. 212.

been the result of adultery.[326] Dispensation was also sought from parentage whereby the father had been married but the mother had been unmarried, whereby the married man had either had an affair or believed he was free of his first wife.[327] Less common were dispensations whereby the mother had been married and the father unmarried, as with Richard Kerned in 1472.[328] In all three volumes, Kerned's is the only case from Hereford whereby dispensation was requested where the mother, not the father, had cheated on a spouse.

Dispensations sometimes shed light on other types of illicit sex. For example, on 6 May 1466, Edmund Glase and Margaret, widow of James Greene, wished to marry but Edmund 'once fornicated several times with a prostitute, who had a son of unknown paternity for whom Margaret acted as godmother. [Therefore] They request a declaration refuting those who claim that an impediment of compaternity prevents them from marrying, so that they may marry.'[329] In this particular example, it seems that the couple were forced to ask for dispensation to marry not because Edmund had fornicated with the prostitute, but because Margaret had acted as the child's godmother and could therefore be questionably related to Edmund through the degrees of consanguinity if it was possible he was the paternal father of the child. The couple seemed to be requesting this dispensation mostly to stop other people in the diocese defaming their relationship. Defamation on the grounds of consanguinity was certainly concerning to couples - although arguably not deemed 'illicit', couples who discovered they were related by consanguinity either prior to or after marriage, also sought dispensation to validate their relationships and protect their future children.[330]

Bigamy was also reported. On 4 July 1490, a couple requested dispensation to allow their marriage, even though they had wed without both being unmarried. It was reported that 'Thomas Hoke and Elizabeth, dwelling in Hereford diocese, married and had several children, knowing that Elizabeth's first husband Thomas Lye was alive; now he is dead they request absolution from adultery and a dispensation that they may

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[326] Ibid., p.55. To be clear, the married man and married woman were married to other people, not each other.

[327] *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, p. 213 and p. 405.

[328] Ibid., p. 212.

[329] Ibid., p.42.

[330] By the fourteenth century the degrees of consanguinity counted only the first four degrees, and were calculated by counting back to the common ancestor. Between 1455 and 1498, at least eight couples requested dispensation from consanguinity, three of which were aware of their kinship prior to marriage. See *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, pp. 16, 133-134, 198, 302-306 and 315-317. Couples who married despite being related by the degrees of consanguinity may be at risk of excommunication, see p. 52.

remain married.'[331] In this case, the couple was able to live openly together, believing themselves to be married, before requesting dispensation. Although it is unclear why some couples were suddenly prompted to clarify their marital statuses, it is likely that this was because of an increase in parochial inquisitions, and heightened interested in marital relationships. It may have been unclear to parishioners that this was 'morally wrong' or couples may have been aware of the issue but had to wait until their first partner died before fully legitimising new relationships. Either way, to be able to have children the couples must have been together for a number of years, apparently without any previous punishment from the town or church authorities.

To analyse the data that emerged from the supplications between 1410 and 1503, I have conflated all the evidence relating to Hereford into a table (see below). Overall, the largest group asking for dispensation was made up of scholars, followed by lay couples. Of the thirty-five dispensations noted, thirteen were scholars, ten were lay couples, five were priests and three were from clerks. The remaining few were laymen and laywomen and members of the clergy. The most common reasons for requesting dispensation were put forward equally by those born of unmarried men and unmarried women (possibly young couples or those who had intended to get married eventually), and couples who were related in the third and fourth degrees of consanguinity. The second most common reason was split between those who had been born of priests and unmarried women, and those who had been born of a married man and unmarried woman. The remaining reasons were split between a very small numbers of requests. As only thirty-five requests were made in the Hereford diocese over a span of ninety-three years (1410-1503), it is impossible to draw conclusions from these results, although it is possible to see common themes from those requesting dispensation. It seems that lay couples might marry having previous knowledge of their kinship, and risked both excommunication and illegitimacy of their children. Defamation was clearly concerning to couples, therefore some sought dispensation to prove to their communities that their marriages were valid, and to prevent further gossip. In cases where the couples had prior relationships, dispensation was simply requested to legitimise long term partners.

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[331] Ibid., pp. 360-2. In the other example, Hugh Clon had left his first wife Alice and was requesting dispensation to remain married to Matilda, whom he had married despite still being married to Alice.

Table 2: Dispensations requested in Hereford, 1410-1503. Data collected from *Supp AP*, 3 vols (1410-1503).

Types of dispensation sought	Types of people applying for dispensation							
	Scholar	Lay man	Lay woman	Lay couple	Clergy	Priest	Clerk	**Total**
Born of married man and married woman*						3		3
Born of married man and unmarried woman	4						1	5
Born of priest and married woman						1		1
Born of priest and unmarried woman	4						1	5
Born of unmarried man and married woman	1							1
Born of unmarried man and unmarried woman	4				1	1	1	7
Fornicated with a prostitute		1						1
Related in the 2nd and 4th degree of consanguinity**				1				1

Related in the 3rd and 4th degree of consanguinity				7				7
Related in the 4th degree of consanguinity				1				1
Remarried despite still being married		1	1					2
Totals	13	2	1	9	1	5	3	34

* Married to other people, not each other.

**Consanguinity; blood-relatedness. Degrees are counted up from the partner to the joint ancestor, e.g. the first degree of consanguinity would be a parent-child relationship, a fourth degree could be between first cousins and so on.

Is there any evidence that members of the church were involved in illicit sex?

As Norwich and Hereford were cathedral towns, it is perhaps hardly surprising that evidence from the fifteenth century that alludes to illicit sex can be found in the bishops' registers and ecclesiastical visitations. A wealth of evidence suggests that clerical sex was prevalent in both towns, and that this sometimes led to bastardy. As has been seen, children born as bastards also show up in the evidence, seeking dispensation as adults.

In her research on single mothers and bastardy in medieval England, Philippa Maddern discovered at least 540 illegitimate births from 1350 to 1520 in a sample of dioceses that include Hereford, although she stresses that this number is far from complete.[332] Her research concludes that fornicating couples found engaging in sex after

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[332] Philippa Maddern, '"Oppressed by Utter Poverty": Survival Strategies for Single Mothers and Their Children in Late Medieval England' in *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern*

forswearing each other's company were often assumed to be married by the church. Ecclesiastical jurisdictions could rule that a couple found to be living in concubinage, or repeatedly accused of fornication, could be ordered to forswear each other's company. If it was discovered that they had not done so by the ecclesiastical authorities, the authorities could decide that they were therefore married, and a court could order that this marriage be solemnized in a church.[333] However, few fathers of illegitimate children were in positions to marry, with nearly 40% being married already, and just over 30% being recorded as a priest or monk.[334] Of the sample studied, Maddern found that overall 69% of the 259 identifiable fathers were either officially celibate or married to somebody else.

Interestingly, she concluded that illegitimacy would not necessarily lead to poverty, as some illegitimate children went on to have successful careers and could be apprentices.[335] In many of the cases, the child was separated from the mother at an early age and adopted into the father's home.[336] In other examples, the mothers of illegitimate children actively fought for their right to child support, and even sued fathers through the ecclesiastical courts, although financial support was often only provided for a set period of time (for example during the child's infancy).[337] As has been discussed, the *Supplications* support this conclusion, as in the majority of cases, dispensation was requested to pardon the claimant for the cause of their birth, for example for being the child of an unmarried couple.[338]

Hereford

Evidence from the *Supplications* also suggests that clerics in Hereford engaged in illicit sex, and children therefore sometimes requested dispensation from clerical parentage. In some cases, women may have acted as long term girlfriends or wives of clerics, as seems to have been the case with Thomas le Breton, a canon of Hereford who

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England and France ed. by Anne M. Scott (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), pp. 41-62 (p. 43). Unfortunately it is not possible to disentangle figures for Hereford alone from these statistics.

[333] Ibid., p. 45.

[334] Ibid., p. 47.

[335] Although the situation could be dire: of the 116 known circumstances of the children and their mothers, Maddern found that 27% of the mothers were working as servants or prostitutes and 13% of the children were abandoned, sold, or had died, and nine were suspected to have been the victim of infanticide. See ibid, table 3.2, p. 50.

[336] Ibid., p. 61.

[337] In only one fifth of cases the father was ordered to provide financial support for the child, and this was normally set for a short period of time, e.g. until the child was three years old. Although she suspects it happened, there is no hard evidence of the men being blackmailed into paying more money before 1500.

[338] For example see *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, p. 212.

was accused of living publicly with Johanna de Cole, for which he was excommunicated.[339] Dispensation was also requested where a child had been the result of adulterous sex between a priest and a married woman, as with scholar Noelen Grefed in 1470.[340] Between 1466 and 1490, three scholars and four clerks also asked for dispensation so that they could be promoted, having being born of priests and unmarried women, which again could indicate relationships between priests and women who acted as their girlfriends or wives.[341] I have included the evidence from these cases in the above table, which suggests that dispensation from clerical parentage was one of the most common forms of dispensation found in Hereford.

Norwich

The leet court rolls too uncovered an interesting case of clerical sex and concubinage. The leet roll of 1289-90 presented the case of John the Redepriest, saying that he was 'guilty of the murder of a… child begotten of his concubine' and was arrested in the leet of Conesford, again the location of *Ber Street*; 'item dicunt quod idem Johannes est culpabilis de murdo unius parvi procreati de concubine sua'.[342] This horrific case, whilst uncommon, lends itself to an interesting question about unwanted pregnancy. A pregnant concubine would have opened John up to public scandal; he was a priest and, therefore, unable to marry, but as has been touched upon, clerical celibacy was not necessarily valued highly in practice. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for priests to have non-marital relationships which culminated in children, and which acted in all but marriage as a normal functioning family. Although it is unclear why John killed the child, it is perhaps the sad truth that infanticide would have been a way to stop unwanted bastardy.

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[339] Forrest and Whittick., p. 758. Although not noted as his concubine, this is the word used by Forrest and Whittick in reference to the fact that despite clearly having a long term relationship the two were unable to marry. Forrest argues that the accusations made against the bishops in the 1280s were part of the new demand for accountability from institutions. See Forrest, 'The Transformation of Visitation in Thirteenth Century England', p. 34.

[340] *Supp AP, Vol II: 1464-1492*, p. 71.

[341] Ibid., p.56, 71, 405, 410, and 417. 'Scholars' in this context, may be defined as young men who wanted to join the clergy. If, as is likely, John Wyston's father was the same 'John Wyston' who appears in the *Calendar of Inquisitions* in 1428 as a juror, the couple may have come from the small market town of Hay, east of Hereford across the Welsh border. See *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other analogous documents preserved in the public record office, Volume XXIII 6-10 Henry VI (1427-1432)*, ed. by Claire Noble (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), p. 76.

[342] *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the 13th and 14th Centuries*, p. 35. Rawcliffe and Wilson discuss this case. See Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson, eds., *Medieval Norwich* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 197.

Punishments: What punishments took place, and did other concerns influence these?

In both Norwich and Hereford, the town authorities felt the need to inquire and punish cases of illicit sex, although these fell under differing jurisdictions. Unlike Oxford and Cambridge, the civic structures of Norwich and Hereford were obviously not dominated by university officials. The locations of public punishments in towns were deliberate; these were intended to provide the maximum humiliation and therefore often took place in the busiest areas. Those found guilty of engaging in illicit sex, prostitution and adultery, would be punished in the market place or paraded around the town to humiliate them, although they could also be fined or in extreme cases, banished, as in Cambridge and Oxford.

Hereford: Punishment

Hereford was governed by four 'fees', or property owning groups: the king's fee (made up of the burgesses), the bishop's men, the men of the dean and chapter and the hospital of St John, whilst the castle remained in its own hands.[343] Punishment was divided between the town's four authorities, the castle, and the 'Council in the Marches of Wales' which was set up in 1471. This council was developed from the personal council of the Prince of Wales, and it required Hereford to enlist sheriffs to help defend England against the Welsh. Although Hereford was originally exempt from its jurisdiction, by 1510 the council began to enact direct jurisdiction within the town.[344] Overall, nearly half of the town was under the control of the bishop and chapter, making it the most powerful fee, and meaning that the church had jurisdiction in matters of illicit sexuality. As the church's jurisdiction was so far-reaching in Hereford, and there was a large clerical population, it was often in dispute with the burgesses.[345] Offenders could be sent to the bishop's prison, located to the south of the cathedral precinct, or to the county gaol, which lay on *Gropecunt Lane*.[346]

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[343] Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800,* p. 7.
[344] *VCH, Herefordshire*, I, p. 377.
[345] Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800,* p. 7.
[346] Ibid., p. 6.

Imprisonment was not a common form of punishment for prostitution in Hereford however, and even those who were actually sent to the county gaol on *Gropecunt Lane* may have escaped. The sheriff and knights of Hereford were sent to inquire concerning the escape of prisoners in 1453, and found that there were at least thirteen cases of suspects escaping from the gaol as a result of a 'lack of good keeping' (or deliberately releasing prisoners), between 1447 and 1454. In at least three of these cases, the prisoners all somehow managed to escape from the gaol under the questionable watch of John Chippenham, the then mayor of Hereford and the keeper of the gaol keys. In 1451, Chippenham deliberately allowed a widow named Joan to leave the gaol in return for financial payment of 5 marks.[347] Although the calendar does not record what Joan's felony was, as her husband had died, it was likely related to poverty, perhaps theft or prostitution. What is likely is that if prostitutes ended up in *Gropecunt Lane* prison, and had money, they could bribe their way out.

Episcopal registers from Hereford in the fifteenth century record punishments of cases of sexual misconduct. Although the ecclesiastical courts held jurisdiction in matters of clerical sex, it seems that in Hereford secular judges could also hear criminal cases against the clerics. The register of Thomas Poltone, bishop of Hereford between 1420 and 1422, states that clerics convicted of criminal offences (including interaction with prostitutes), by magistrates or secular judges within the diocese of Hereford should be imprisoned in the bishop's prison.[348] The register of Reginald Boulers also shows that secular judges could impose punishments on members of the church. On 20 November 1451, two vicars choral and the vicar of the cathedral of St John the Baptist were commissioned to take clerics convicted by secular judges to the bishop's prison.[349]

Alongside punishing members of the church who were engaging in sexual activity, the register shows that the bishops would also punish priests who were not preventing adultery and incontinence within their parishes. Richard Beauchamp's register, drawn up in 1449, although the shortest to survive, is perhaps one of the most interesting because it contains an entry regarding Beauchamp's installation in Hereford, in which he openly rebuked the dean for failing to repress adultery within his jurisdiction. The register reports that on 1 December 1449, the bishop had required the

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[347] *Cal IM*: *Volume VIII: 1422-1485* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), p. 144.
[348] *The Register of Thomas Poltone, Bishop of Hereford A.D. 1420-1422*, trans. by W. Capes (Hereford: Wilson & Phillips, 1916), p. 13.
[349] *The Register of Reginaldi Boulers, Bishop of Hereford, 1451-1453*, p. 16. The registers do not specify what these criminal acts were.

dean to proceed against certain open adulterers, subject to his jurisdiction, whose offences he had neglected to stop. Beauchamp further reprimanded the dean, saying that reports had reached him that incontinence had been allowed to take place, and that the dean had failed to punish delinquents, or correct or reform offenders, and had for a long time had his 'eyes half closed' to crime, being both negligent and careless.[350] In this case, the new bishop had used his installation to apparently openly reprimand a member of his clergy who had been doing little (if anything) in the fight against immoral goings on. Interestingly, the register also shows that even within the same church, clerics may have different views on the seriousness of sexual incontinence.

Overall, although punishments were split between four bodies in Hereford, topography still played an important part in punishment and was an important part of establishing who held jurisdiction in these cases. It mattered specifically where a perpetrator was being punished, not just that they were being punished. This is evident of clerics found interacting with prostitutes, who were taken from secular imprisonment to an ecclesiastical prison.

Norwich: Punishment

In Norwich, the mayor, aldermen, sheriffs, justices of gaol delivery, justices of the peace and constables held responsibility for maintaining order, keeping the peace, investigating sexual activity and enquiring about nightwalkers.[351] Furthermore, justices of gaol delivery examined both moral and spiritual matters. Whilst the constables came from a wide range of backgrounds, in her research on the constabulary, Samantha Sagui noted that some occupational groups such as hostellers were excluded, perhaps because the roles held a certain amount of prestige and hostellers 'attracted public censure.'[352]

Although a prison existed in the castle in Norwich until 1883, in his memoir, John Kirkpatrick noted that there was a separate women's prison near the guildhall. This is corroborated by the conclusions of an assembly on 18 January 1454, when the town's mayor announced that Ralph Segrym 'proposes to construct a prison for

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[350] *The Register of Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Hereford, 1449-1450*, ed. by A. T. Bannister (Hereford: Wilson and Phillips, 1917), p. 8.

[351] Samantha Sagui, 'Mid-Level Officials in Fifteenth Century Norwich' in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by Linda Clarke and Carole Rawcliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 101-121 (p. 105). Sagui discusses in length the background and social status of these constables, and demonstrates that they came from all political ranks. See pp. 106-7.

[352] Sagui, pp. 101-121 (p. 110). In Table 4, Sagui demonstrates that between 1414 and 1473, hostellers made up 0% of constables and only one supervisor was registered as a hosteller, see p. 121.

detaining women therein and for separating them from the society of men, and for avoiding crimes which might arise.'[353]

The sheriffs of Norwich were able to imprison offenders, and in 1465 they arrested a certain John Deynes who had apparently attempted to force himself on the wife of Robert Smith, before spending the night with a servant of the household. He was fined 100s.[354] Crime was seen as a public matter, as disorder in the town equated to bad governance. For this reason, the constables, sheriffs, mayors and leet courts made clear and genuine attempts to prevent criminal and immoral activity, and those found 'breaking the peace' could be burdened with a hefty fine, as John was. Furthermore, cases of infidelity represented a public nuisance, if the matter could not be dealt with privately and if the incident caused public scandal, those involved could be brought before the mayor, calling a town's morality into question. Casson demonstrates that towns' insistence on good public order came from a need for the town to have a good reputation, meaning that the town needed to be seen to be 'well administered' and to have well behaved citizens, as 'a reputation for being well administered could help medieval towns to obtain [administrative] privileges from the crown.'[355] This was apparent in 1434, when Katherine Florens was brought before the mayor and forced to defend her reputation, by attesting that that although Thomas Grys had attempted to seduce her, no sexual activity had actually taken place.[356]

As in Cambridge, sometimes punishments for prostitutes encouraged the use of humiliation. Blomefield tells us of a punishment for a prostitute who was found in a garden in Norwich which took place in 1562 in St Simon and Jude's parish, Fye Bridge Street, in the northern part of the town. Eighteen year old Benet Gedwyis was accused of whoredom and was forced to ride on a cart 'with a paper on her head & Tynklyd with a Bason, & so at one a clock to be had to the Cokyng-Stool & ducked in the water.'[357] This punishment may not have been encouraged by the local community, as apparently at this point a local onlooker removed the paper from Benet's head and threw it in the river. As this action was taken in full view of the public and an alderman's wife, it

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[353] *The (Selected) Records of the City of Norwich, Vol II*, ed. by W. Hudson & J. C. Tingey, 2 vols (Norwich: The Corporation of the City of Norwich, 1910), p. 91. The footnote to this record states that Segrym was Wilbeye's executor.

[354] Maddern, 'Order and Disorder' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 189- 212 (p. 189).

[355] Casson, pp. 387-408 (p. 388).

[356] Maddern, 'Order and Disorder' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 189- 212 (p. 193).

[357] Blomefield, p. 739.

shows that the public viewed this punishment as wrong. In her research on the 1570 Norwich census of the poor, Lesley Silvester discusses Benet alongside other single poor women that the authorities were concerned with. By this time, Benet, now twenty-six years old, had been left the single mother of two young children living in a house with two other families. Of these residents, Anne Morden had also been noted for illicit behaviour, for 'keeping women of evil behaviour… and keeping suspect houses and suspect persons'.[358] Silvester argues that the authorities did not approve of single women living alone in case they 'fell to lust'. Of the 147 women noted in the census, forty women between the ages of fifteen and fifty shared houses with other people. It was these that the authorities were most concerned with. However, only fourteen women in the census were listed as 'harlots', nine of whom had children or were unmarried but pregnant.[359]

Although the clients of prostitutes were rarely punished, Maddern believes that four presentments in Norwich in 1440 demonstrate attempts to do just this. The presentments state that two houses had been broken into and the malefactors had carnally known the wives there. Maddern argues that 'these [presentments] may reflect attempts to manipulate categories of legal presentment in order to punish the clients of known prostitutes,' which would have been exceptionally uncommon and was not found in any of the other case studies discussed in this thesis.[360]

It is impossible to know how many cases were simply never presented or never came to light, although cases of female adultery were seen to be the responsibility of the husband unless the case became a public scandal and was therefore damaging to the town's reputation.[361] The Paston Letters therefore represent a unique insight into how families privately dealt with cases of sexual immorality that would otherwise be hidden. The letters describe the family's life in Norfolk throughout the 1400s. In 1472 Edmund wrote that he had been forced by their mother to dismiss his manservant, Gregory, because she held Gregory responsible for a prostitute staying the night in their stables.

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[358] Lesley Silvester, 'The Experience of Single Women in Early Modern Norwich: 'Rank Beggars, Gresse Maydes and Harlots'', in *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern England and France*, ed. by Anne M. Scott (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012), pp. 85-103 (p. 101).

[359] Ibid., pp. 85-103 (pp. 93-98).

[360] Maddern, 'Order and Disorder' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 189- 212 (p. 201).

[361] Adultery was seen commonly as a predominately female offence. For an example, see the works of the fourteenth century Dominican, John Bromyard. See John Bromyard, *Summa Praedicantium, Prima Pars*, 2 vols (1586), I (Venice, 1586), Cap. V, p. 362. <https://archive.org/stream/JohnBromyardSummaPraedicantiumParsPrima1586/BromyardSummaPraed1586-1#page/n3/mode/2up> [accessed 11 July 2019].

According to the letter, Gregory had invited the said prostitute to their manor house at Mautby when two passing ploughmen saw what was going on and asked to be involved.[362] Edmund complains that it was of these ploughmen, not Gregory, with whom the prostitute then spent the night.[363] Although Gregory was dismissed, no other form of punishment was involved, as the family attempted to quietly deal with the situation to avoid scandal. The family members themselves made no attempt to present the case to the authorities, which shows that if prostitution was going on in manors around the county, it would be almost impossible to trace.

In cases of illicit sexuality, adultery and suspicious behaviour that did come to light, fines were the most commonly used way of punishing sexual crimes. Court rolls held in the Norfolk Record Office tell us that on 20 November 1499, Kate Pointery was fined 3d for living suspiciously in her house, but her address is sadly not listed. Further, Edward was fined 3d for frequenting Kate in the house of a man named John.[364] It is very possible that Kate herself was working as a prostitute, although it is just as likely that she and Edward were young lovers looking for somewhere away from prying eyes where they could meet.

Norwich: Other concerns affecting punishments and regulations

Punishments in Norwich may have been encouraged further by the authorities concerns about public health. Thanks to the research undertaken by Carole Rawcliffe amongst others, Norwich makes a particularly interesting case study in the topic of illicit sex, because the towns focus on health adds an extra dimension to how the town's authorities dealt with and viewed sexual promiscuity.

Authorities in Norwich believed that public immorality was directly associated with public health, in that both physical and moral uncleanliness led to unclean towns. The connection between sexual promiscuity and disease was hardly limited to Norwich, as has been addressed in previous chapters: Cambridge officials too made the connection between moral cleanliness and physical cleanliness, and as will be discussed, regulations about street cleaning occurred in both Gloucester and Great Yarmouth. This belief was further validated on the continent. In Utrecht, prostitutes

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[362] *Paston Letters of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by N. Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3 vols, vol 1, p. 635. This letter was probably written on the 16 may 1472.
[363] Helen Castor, *Blood & Roses, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2004), p. 241.
[364] *NRO*, Y/C4/202, roll 4.

were removed from the city centre because of concerns over public health and morality, and in France measures were adopted during plague times to limit the movement of prostitutes.[365] For example in 1402, in the northern French town of Saint-Flour, the council confined all the prostitutes from the town to one house during a plague epidemic, whilst in Abbeville prostitutes where not allowed to use public ovens after 1493.[366] Interestingly, in some northern French towns, officials actually prevented prostitutes from going outside the town walls, even to collect firewood, during times of plague in an attempt to control their movements. This clearly goes against the common understanding of prostitutes being forced away from the cities and confined to the 'urban fringe'.[367]

Ordinances in Norwich from the fifteenth century show that during outbreaks of plague, the town's officials were more concerned with sexual promiscuity than ever, which encouraged them to take further precautions against the spread of disease. It was because of this that the officials in Norwich saw fit to restrict the movement of servants and prevent potentially ill travellers from staying in the town's inns, including the 'Common Inn' and others located near the market. An assembly on 14 December 1453, concluded that 'all those holding common inns in the city shall not receive or entertain any [suspect] person or persons in their inns, except those for who they are willing to answer according to the ancient ordinances of the city. And that all men dwelling in the city, of whatsoever condition they may be, shall warn their servants that they shall not be absent outside the houses of their masters after the eighth hour, under the penalty of imprisonment.'[368] It is probable that the importance placed upon inn holders being able to 'answer' for their customers was also an attempt by the officials to prevent the movement of vagabonds and prostitutes, by forcing the inn holders to prevent questionable characters from residing in their inns or face imprisonment. The restricted movement of servants is likewise an indication of the authorities preventing the spread of plague. This was probably a deliberate attempt to prevent sexual relationships occurring between servants of different households, as illicit sexual contact and immorality was seen to be a cause of disease. McSheffrey explains this concept by arguing that men were expected to have good governance over their households, for

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[365] Rawcliffe and Weeda, p. 179.
[366] Neil Murphy, 'Plague Ordinances and the Management of Infectious Diseases in Northern French Towns, c.1450-c.1560' in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by Linda Clarke and Carole Rawcliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 139-160 (p. 152).
[367] Ibid.
[368] *The (Selected) Records of the City of Norwich, Vol II*, p. 91.

example by stopping their servants from having premarital sex and not having sexual relationships with servants themselves.[369]

Alongside the plague, recently discovered archaeological evidence has shown that citizens in Norwich may have been also suffering from a strain of pre-Columbian syphilis, which they mistook as leprosy.[370] This would certainly explain the link between immoral sexual activity and leprosy: many believed that lepers were naturally more sexually charged than others, and were therefore more likely to interact with prostitutes, encouraging the spread of disease through intercourse. Women who were seen to be sexually 'loose' or who had many sexual partners were also thought to be more vulnerable to leprosy.[371] Medieval medical writers further argued that leprosy could be spread through sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, or a woman who had previously conducted a physical relationship with a leper.[372] As the lepers' physical symptoms were seen as a physical manifestation of wickedness, sex with a prostitute could explain their physical decay and deformities. Despite this, medical studies over the years have proved beyond doubt that leprosy is not spread through sexual contact, although some lepers may have turned to prostitutes through loneliness, encouraged by a society that marginalised them.[373]

The belief that lepers interacted with prostitutes because of their heightened sex drive was widespread, and encouraged the idea that sex with prostitutes could in turn lead to catching leprosy. The *Book of Margery Kempe* briefly touches upon this belief. At the beginning of Book II, Kempe describes how her son had caught a disease, that she believed to be leprosy, because of sexual activity: 'soon afterwards the same young man went overseas on business, and then, what with the evil enticing of other people, and what with his own folly, he fell into the sin of lechery. Soon after, his colour

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[369] S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Pennsylvania, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 145. For example, in Ely in 1549, the Glegg brothers were suspected of raping and impregnating three or four of the household servants and producing bastard children. See R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 74-88.

[370] The origin of syphilis is still hotly debated, although many believe it was brought back by Columbus' sailors from the new world in 1492. For an archaeological study about syphilis see Ann Stirland, *Criminals and Paupers: The Graveyard of St Margaret Fyebriggate in Combusto, Norwich* (Norfolk: Historic Environment, 2009).

[371] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies,* p. 110.

[372] Carole Rawcliffe, *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1995), p. 36. Sex with a woman who was menstruating was seen as dirty and morally wrong.

[373] Luke Demaitre, 'The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth-Century Physicians', *Bulletin of the History of medicine*, 59 (1985), pp. 327-344 (p. 334).

changed, and his face grew full of pimples and pustules, like a leper.'[374] Although her son was eventually freed from the disease, the story clearly indicates a believed link between leprosy and lustfulness, which is why Kempe assumes her son has leprosy. Rawcliffe writes that this example is particularly interesting when we consider the recent arguments about pre-Columbian syphilis, saying 'if, as seems likely, confusion between leprosy and sexually transmitted disease occurred in the Middle Ages, the assumption that lepers were promiscuous might have had some limited justification in fact.'[375]

As Rawcliffe argues, if medieval medical writers had confused leprosy with syphilis, then their belief that leprosy could be caught through sex would have some foundation. [376] However, not all historians agree that medieval medical writers really had confused syphilis for leprosy. In his article on the diagnosis of leprosy in the fourteenth century, Luke Demaitre questions whether medical texts really did confuse the two, as he argues that many medical writers stated no connection between sexual intercourse and leprosy, or simply ignored the discussion completely.[377] Of course, just because some medical writers disagreed that there was a connection does not mean that all were convinced by this, and it seems clear that medical writers and religious authorities alike perceived some connection between sexual immorality and physical disease, which gave authority to the claim that leprosy could be spread through sexual intercourse.

Overall, the authorities were concerned about the wrong 'type' of sex. Illicit sexuality, adultery and prostitution could lead to outbreaks of leprosy and the spread of plague, and affect the town's moral health. In *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain,* Gervase Rosser and Patricia Dennison reinforce this point, arguing that 'noxious' or 'antisocial' trades, such as prostitution, were banished to the town's limits, although this is not true of Norwich where *Grope Lane* was located in the centre of the town.[378]

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[374] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. by B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), pp. 265-6. Lechery is defined as 'excessive or offensive sexual desires; lustfulness.'
[375] Rawcliffe, *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich*, p. 39.
[376] Excavations from St Margaret Fyebriggate's graveyard, on the north end of Magdalene Street, showed that six of the 413 bodies may have had a pre-Columbian strain of syphilis. See Stirland, p. 35.
[377] Demaitre, p. 335.
[378] G. Rosser and E. Dennison, ed. 'Urban Culture and the Church 1300-1540' in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, p. 341.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to draw together evidence about sexual misconduct in the medieval cathedral towns of Hereford and Norwich, building on the foundation of research by historians such as Rawcliffe and Karras. As cathedral towns, many ecclesiastical records have survived such as the various episcopal registers throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[379] The evidence strongly suggests that for both towns, the authorities were concerned about clerics (and priests) engaging in illicit sex, although this conclusion is undoubtedly skewed by the fact that the majority of the evidence comes from church records and leet courts. Overall, the records indicate that adultery, incest, fornication, bastardy, prostitution, concubinage and clerical sex were all held to be present, and the children of these acts might request dispensation to allow the progression of their careers or support their own children.

Topographically, both towns had lanes that attracted illicit sexual activity and prostitution. The topography of *Gropecunt Lane* in Hereford seems at first glance to indicate it would have attracted illicit sex. However, it is problematic when we compare it to other stereotypically sexualised streets, because, in terms of size, Hereford's *Gropecunt Lane* was uncommonly large. In contrast, the longer and somewhat wider *Gropecunt Lane* found in Hereford could not have acted as a 'dark lane for lovers', and connected the east end of the market to the town's wall, making it a potentially busy thoroughfare. In Norwich, *Gropecunt Lane*, also known as *Turpis Vicus*, was notorious for prostitution until the seventeenth century, although *Whores Lane* and *Ber Street* may have also acted as a quiet lane for lovers. Alternatively, individuals looking for illicit encounters could visit Norwich's 'Common Inn'. In both towns, these streets were located next to busy market areas, with easy access to the cathedral, other churches, town gates and the towns' inns, and mimicked other streets named after the occupations which took place there.

Excommunication, humiliation, fines and imprisonment were all used as punishment; although in many cases simply acknowledging guilt or agreeing to marry seem to have been enough to deter serious punishment. In Hereford, punishments were

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[379] Visitations recorded from the diocese of Hereford from 1286 to 1317, although too early to be included here, have extremely interesting accusations of sexual misconduct, rape, adultery, concubinage, fornication, incest, sorcery and witchcraft. See Forrest and Whittick, *passim*, and see Forrest, 'The Transformation of Visitation in Thirteenth Century England', pp. 3-38.

deliberately located near to notoriously bad areas to act as deterrents, with the gaol being located on *Gropecunt Lane*, though excommunication was the most common form of punishment for parishioners found committing adultery. In Norwich, leet courts dealt with cases of illicit sexual activity, but the punishments recorded for these are inconclusive. The cases reported do illuminate interesting questions however, such as what to do if one was involved in a case of unwanted pregnancy, especially if the father was a known member of the church. Although punishments recorded in the leet court rolls are patchy, those that are reported give us an idea of how the authorities dealt with sexual misconduct. Women could be sent to the women's prison, though most perpetrators of sexually related crimes were fined, although after the Reformation punishments became much more public and women could face public shaming such as the cucking stool. If a case of sexual promiscuity could not be dealt with privately, breakers of the peace could be brought before the mayor to answer for their character in an attempt to prevent public scandal ruining the reputation of the town. Finally, women thought to be engaging in prostitution could be fined, prosecuted or banished, although members of the town may have attempted to stop this.

Although it is true that prostitutes would have been predominately poor women, it is notable that the argument that there were more prostitutes in poor towns, where women struggled to find work, is not true of Norwich. Whilst many of the prostitutes there would have been poor, the town itself was ranked fifth in the 1377 Poll Tax, with nearly 4,000 recorded taxpayers, and may have had three sexually infamous streets, unlike the other towns studied in this thesis. This would instead encourage the argument that prostitutes were more likely to be found in richer towns, with access to more clientele and work.

4. MARKET TOWNS

In this chapter, I will explore illicit sex in England's medieval market towns, looking at a sample of five towns: Shrewsbury, Bury St Edmunds, Great Yarmouth, Gloucester and Colchester. I have chosen these five towns because as previously stated, all rank highly by tax-paying population in the 1377 Poll Tax: they all have from around two thousand to four thousand recorded tax payers, and are therefore ranked in the top twenty-five of the recorded towns. We have seen in previous chapters that in other town types (such as cathedral and university towns) the market played an important role for prostitutes and their clients as a meeting place, and lanes associated with sex centred around these areas. However, previous chapters have looked at areas synonymous with a particular clientele, such as university students and clerics, so this chapter will investigate whether tradesmen acted as the main clientele in towns where trade predominated. Illicit sex in Colchester, Gloucester and Bury St Edmunds has, like in towns in previous chapters, been largely ignored by academic research thus far, and none of the towns mentioned are discussed by Karras. Some work has been undertaken on the topography of Shrewsbury, with John Brickdale Blakeway's work in the 1900s, and more recently the extensive assessment of medieval place names by Margaret Gelling.[380] Additionally, Baker and Holt discuss Shrewsbury's *Grope Lane* in their work on prostitution in medieval towns.[381] However, this research has never been brought together to assess whether the topography of a medieval market town played a part in facilitating or punishing illicit sex. Karras discusses Great Yarmouth only in passing, but does state that prostitutes in Yarmouth were prosecuted for not wearing striped hoods, saying that this may have acted as a way for the town to profit financially, and was intended 'to fine and license.'[382]

Market towns defined

It is worth establishing what is meant by 'market town'. Britnell describes it as:

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[380] John Brickdale Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', ed. by W. Phillips, *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 3 (1907), 311-350 and M. Gelling, *The Place Names of Shropshire, Part Four; Shrewsbury Town and Suburbs and the Liberties of Shrewsbury* (Nottingham: English Place Name Society, 2004).
[381] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', pp. 201-216.
[382] Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 19-22.

> A place in the centre of a town or township set aside for trade, but with numerous other public functions […] [or] a formally regulated meeting of buyers and sellers […] in a particular market place on a particular day […] The right to organise and profit from such a market was - at least from after 1066 in England […] regarded as a franchise from the crown to which the entitlement was either by ancient right or by explicit royal grant.[383]

All the medieval English provincial towns mentioned so far had a market place; for people who made their living through agriculture and trade, market places in their local towns were essential. These market places gave distinctive shapes to the towns, and larger or older towns could have more than one market (for example in London). Their shapes varied between orthogonal, rectangular, triangular and semi-circular (Bury is a good example of a rectangular shaped market), although monastic towns tended to have triangular markets.[384] Markets were public spaces, and were therefore the location of disciplinary functions (for example the pillory), but were also frequently dominated by churches which could become meeting points for secular functions, and mostly had a 'market infill', a narrow strip of shops often without yards or gardens.[385] A medieval 'market town' legally had the right to host markets and was often synonymous with large fairs. Bury was granted two annual fairs by Henry III in 1235.[386] Likewise, Shrewsbury had an abbey, but qualifies as a market town thanks to the important part it played in the wool trade between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Great Yarmouth too held a fair, though it shared jurisdiction of its fair with the Cinque Ports. Colchester, supposedly England's 'oldest market town' (having Roman foundations), also acted as an important centre for the wool and cloth trade in the fourteenth century, and functioned as the main market town for trade from the villages and townships of north-east Essex and south-west Suffolk. A four-day fair was granted to Colchester's St John's Abbey in 1104, which was blamed by some in the town for having a 'demoralising' influence, especially on working class girls.[387]

The importance of regulation

Marketgoers became synonymous with particular vices such as covetousness, and craftsmen and tradesmen alike were believed to be involved in immoral activities

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[383] R. Britnell, *Britain and Ireland 1050- 1530, Economy and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 534.

[384] D. M. Palliser, T. R. Slater and E. Patricia Dennison, 'The topography of towns 600-1300', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 153-186 (pp. 167-8).

[385] Ibid., p. 169.

[386] St Edmundsbury only changed from a parish church in 1914.

[387] J. Cooper, *A History of the county of Essex, Vol IX: The Borough of Colchester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 273.

such as gambling, theft and prostitution. As James Davis points out, many of these traders would have stayed in the towns' local inns, the cheapest of which would have undoubtedly doubled up as brothels and hotspots for gambling. Innkeepers could use the attractiveness of such places to push up prices, using flattery and also marketing the value of 'their girls'.[388] The deceitful image of innkeepers was further fuelled by the biblical story of Mary and Joseph being turned away in Bethlehem.[389] McIntosh reinforces the belief that innkeepers were seen as deceitful. She argues that in the 1500s, smaller inns run by men or women were viewed by local authorities as centres of disorder. Some of these may indeed have been unsafe to travellers, with clients being robbed by the innkeepers.[390] Although no evidence of theft by innkeepers will be discussed in this chapter, cases against alewives in Colchester in the 1300s (discussed later) certainly tend to confirm McIntosh's findings, as the town authorities worried that taverns and inns attracted 'suspect' people. In his research into inn-keeping, John Hare questions the validity of the argument that innkeepers were suspect people, arguing instead that innkeepers were often members of the urban elite, who came from wealthy families and played important roles in towns' civic government.[391] However, there were clearly suspicions about the morality of innkeepers, and Hare notes that in 1535 rules in Winchester prevented the town's mayor from being an innkeeper, or from selling ale from his home, and this may have been because a future innkeeper was presented as a prostitute in both 1381 and 1387, showing the link between illicit sex and inn-keeping.[392]

Regulation of the market was therefore seen by the authorities in market towns as a necessity to ensure the morality of the town.[393] Whether regulations throughout the 1400s worked is debatable. In Nottingham in 1408, hostellers were accused of harbouring harlots on numerous occasions, and in Coventry in 1492, officials ordered that no one should harbour women of ill-fame.[394] There were also repressive measures against innkeepers in Ipswich in the fifteenth century, although again whether these were successful is debatable. In 1410, for example, the Fadinor family (who were small-

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[388] J. Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 49 and p. 71.
[389] Ibid., p. 114.
[390] McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300- 1620*, pp. 204-5.
[391] John Hare, 'Inns, innkeepers and the society later medieval England, 1350- 1600', *Journal of Medieval History*, 39 (2013), 477-497 (pp. 489-491) <https://doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2013.833132>
[392] Ibid., pp. 494-495.
[393] Statutory regulation of the market economy increased after 1330. See Britnell, R. H., *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 173.
[394] Davis, p. 247.

scale retailers) were fined for 'forestalling' or pushing up prices and entertaining prostitutes in their house. The prevention of brothels in alehouses and inns in Ipswich was nevertheless still a problem some sixty years later, when fourteen more individuals were fined for encouraging prostitution, adultery and fornication in 1468.[395] It is perhaps understandable that the authorities in many towns were concerned about strange travellers. As a result, inns were certainly seen as hotbeds for potential crime and many of the inquisitions into alehouses ended in fines.

Prosperous market towns in this chapter

Colchester, Gloucester and Bury were reasonably prosperous in the fourteenth century. Colchester was the ninth largest town in England according to the 1377 Poll Tax, with 2,951 recorded tax payers. It recovered quickly from the Black Death, although the castle was apparently in disrepair.[396] Wool fairs were regular in the fourteenth century, with hanseatic merchants in Colchester being particularly prominent, and extensive building spread outside the town walls.[397] Bury was the fifteenth largest town according to the 1377 Poll Tax, with 2,445 recorded taxpayers and therefore was the third largest of all the towns studied in this thesis. The abbey was one of the richest in England, which in turn was profitable for the town, in part because pilgrims came to see the relics of St Edmund.[398] Gloucester ranked eighteenth in the 1377 Poll Tax with 2,239 recorded tax payers and an estimated population of 3,000-4,000.[399] However, Gloucester was hit hard by the Black Death in 1348, with nineteen out of the thirty Augustinian canons of Llanthony Priory dying.[400] Despite this, Gloucester was quite prosperous in the fifteenth century. It was an active trading centre with luxurious commodities coming from both London and Bristol, and remained fiercely competitive with Bristol and Tewkesbury for trading rights.[401] Although some evidence suggests that the town was suffering a decline in prosperity in the 1400s, modern historians such as Carolyn Heighway have argued that the bailiffs may have been exaggerating the town's financial difficulties, in order to reduce the amount of

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[395] Ibid., pp. 402-7.
[396] Cooper, p. 24.
[397] Ibid., pp. 33-42. In addition to having a successful wool trade, Colchester was notable for its meat industry and Britnell remarks that there were some twenty-one butchers in the town by 1400. See R. H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester 1300- 1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 131.
[398] *VCH*, *Suffolk*, I: Part II, p. 658.
[399] Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).
[400] John Rhodes, *A Calendar of the Registers of the Priory of Llanthony by Gloucester 1457-1466, 1501-1525* (Bristol: The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2002), p. 15.
[401] Carolyn Heighway, *Gloucester: A History and Guide* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Ltd, 1985), pp. 85-6.

money due to the King. Additionally, the town benefited from pilgrimage to the cathedral, with pilgrims coming to visit the remains of Edward II. As in Norwich and Cambridge, the bailiffs in Gloucester were keen to keep the streets clean, and tenants were ordered to maintain the street in front of their tenements.[402]

Smaller market towns in this chapter

Great Yarmouth and Shrewsbury, on the other hand, were somewhat smaller. In the first half of the fourteenth century, Great Yarmouth was ranked among the top ten wealthiest towns in England, but due to recurrent bouts of plague and a fall in immigration, its population was in decline by the end of the fourteenth century. Despite this, Yarmouth ranked nineteenth in the 1377 Poll Tax with a recorded 1,941 taxpayers.[403] The 1377 Poll Tax revealed that Shrewsbury ranked twentieth, with 1,932 total recorded tax payers, and was, therefore, the smallest of the market towns studied in this thesis.[404] By the fifteenth century, Shrewsbury had entered a period of decline, although wool continued to play an important role in the economy. As such, there was no obvious decline in the market, with travellers continuing to come from Wales and West Shropshire.[405] Overall, I have decided to use these five towns for my case study on market towns as each was reasonably prosperous, with in excess of 1500 tax payers, and each ranked highly in the 1377 Poll Tax.

Jurisdiction

Colchester

In Colchester, jurisdiction was split between the town and bishop. The bishop held jurisdiction over the clerics, whilst the burgesses held jurisdiction in most areas within the town walls, although there were areas (such as the castle) where they did not have jurisdiction.[406] It seems that in the 1270s, the abbot had overstepped his jurisdiction within the town, leading to a writ from Henry III, commanding him to desist

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[402] Ibid., p. 95. The *VCH* suggests that Gloucester was in decline in both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See *VCH*, *Gloucester*, IV, pp. 36-37. See also Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 107-108.
[403] Dyer, 'Ranking lists of English medieval towns', in *CUHB*, ed. by Palliser, pp. 747-770 (p. 758).
[404] Ibid.
[405] W. A. Champion and A. T. Thacker, ed. *A History of Shropshire, Vol VI, Part I* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 104-116.
[406] Cooper, p. 49.

from assuming jurisdiction in the town hamlets of Greenstead and West Donyland, where he had erected a cucking stool.[407] From 1372, the four wards of Colchester elected a total of twenty-four bailiffs (twenty of whom were aldermen), and pleas could be heard in the Borough (or Hundred) Court. The town authorities did sometimes hear cases against the church, for example in 1413, when the abbot was brought before the borough court for offences including imprisoning a number of burgesses.[408]

Shrewsbury

Shrewsbury was protected against the Welsh by 'The Council in the Marches of Wales', which arrested suspicious newcomers in 1478. After the Black Death, emergency political measures were put in place and for two years from 1399 to 1401, the town had twenty-five burgesses, although from 1444 this had changed to twelve aldermen who had twenty-four assistants.[409] From 1445 the Borough Court held sessions of the peace and gaol delivery, although the town clerk had a small civic bureaucracy and the common sergeant was responsible for keeping the castle gate gaol, which until 1536 was located in the castle precinct. Criminals could also be placed in the marshalsea prison, mentioned by the *Close Rolls* in 1398.[410] Shrewsbury had three wards, Stone Ward, Welsh Ward and Castle Ward, each of which had an officer who was responsible for making arrests within their own wards.[411] A General Court met twice a year to hear cases, and heard cases of trespass, adultery, sexual misconduct, and dealt with market offences, common scolds, common nuisances and assault, although the King's justices dealt with major crime (such as murder).[412] Scolds could be subjected to the tumbrel or gumble-stool (cucking stool), which Shrewsbury had from 1292. This was moved in the fourteenth century to St John's Hill, on account of the

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[407] Colchester had four hamlets: Lexden, West Donyland, Greenstead and Mile End, all of which were parishes and counted as being inside borough jurisdiction. See *The Red Paper Book of Colchester,* trans. by G. Benham (Colchester: Essex County Standard Office, 1902), p. 163.

[408] The court also heard cases of witchcraft, see Cooper, p. 50 and p. 55. A man and wife were also accused of trying to kill young boys (infanticide) by witchcraft, see p. 66. In Shrewsbury, a case of witchcraft was also reported to the town's authorities in 1579, when a woman was accused of enchanting her cat to disease her neighbour's sow, which had died. See H. Owen and J. B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury, Vol I* (London: Harding, Lepard & Co., 1825), p. 562.

[409] Champion and Thacker, ed. pp. 95-9.

[410] H. Owen, *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury: P. Sandford, 1808), p. 428. The *Close Rolls* report that Richard Alkebarowe, vicar of Sibesseye, was 'brought to Shrewsbury and there imprisoned in the marshalsea prison', which may be a mistranslation, as it was not the infamous marshalsea prison of Southwark, and does not appear elsewhere in the records. See *Cal CR, Richard II, Vol. VI, A.D. 1396-99* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1927), pp. 268-9.

[411] Champion and Thacker, ed. pp. 101-3.

[412] Dorothy Cromarty, *Everyday Life in Medieval Shrewsbury* (Shropshire: Shropshire Books, 1991), p. 84-5. In 1399 for example, the bailiff's brother, Roger Thorne, was brought before the court accused of an affray against the sergeant's wife, Margaret Raves. See Champion and Thacker, ed. p. 98.

'bishop's pond' in the square having dried up, which (until then) was where scolds, bakers and brewers had been ducked.[413] Finally, the 'curia salop', or court of Shropshire, met every fortnight. Perpetrators in Shrewsbury faced mostly fines, although there is evidence suggesting that some trespassers were hanged, as with the case of Richard Crowe in the 1320s, who was hanged for breaking into the house of Roger the Rateler, tying up Roger's wife and stealing his cloak, tunic and brass pot worth 10s.[414] There were certainly gallows in the town in 1346, when the court rolls report that a 'great pit of clay' was dug there.[415] However, in her research on Shrewsbury, Dorothy Cromarty suggests that felons could easily flee the town and cross the border into Wales.[416]

Bury St Edmunds

In Bury, the abbot had the power to punish criminals. Prostitutes residing within the town walls could face banishment, whilst those found consorting with prostitutes or keeping them in their houses could face excommunication. Those found guilty of adultery could also face excommunication, although guilty perpetrators were able to repent or purge for their sins and be left alone thereafter.[417] The abbot held jurisdiction over the eight and a half hundreds, meaning that perpetrators from across these areas were brought to Bury to be imprisoned. The gaol stood adjacent to the town wall and toll house on the western side of the town, on Corn Market, next to the town's main market, to the west of the abbey.[418] Gottfried argues that the gaol was one of the most important in England, and was shared by the abbey and town, which 'was representative of the larger town-abbey struggle.'[419] Further, his research suggests that although the prison had separate quarters for each sex, prostitutes, or those accused of sexual crimes, were unlikely to end up here, and were more likely to be fined, as serious offences were

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[413] Champion and Thacker, ed. p. 102, and J. L. Hobbs, *Shrewsbury Street Names* (Shrewsbury: Wilding & Sons Ltd, 1952), p. 57.
[414] Cromarty, pp. 85-7.
[415] *CRC, Vol I (1310-1352)*, trans. by I. H. Jeayes (Colchester: Colchester Town Council, 1921), p. 210.
[416] Cromarty, p. 89.
[417] *The Letterbook of William of Hoo, Sacrist in Bury St Edmunds 1280-1294*, ed. by A. Gransden (Suffolk: Suffolk Record Society, 1963), p. 28.
[418] M. D. Lobel, 'The Gaol of Bury St Edmunds', in *Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*, 21 (1933), 203-207 (p. 203).
[419] Robert S Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis, 1290-1539* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 172-3.

punished with hangings, whereas the prison was used to punish those accused of larceny, petty theft and property related crimes.[420]

Great Yarmouth

A gaol was granted to Great Yarmouth for criminals and 'malefactors' known as the *Tolhouse* from 1261.[421] This was located in the centre of the town, between the market and the castle. In addition to this, a pillory was built in the market place in 1385 to punish offenders publicly.[422] Like Norwich, Great Yarmouth was governed by bailiffs elected by the town officials, and as will be discussed, prostitutes could be banished to the denes, a beachy area outside of the town.

Gloucester

In Gloucester, punishment was upheld by both the ecclesiastical and town courts. The centre of borough administration was located at the Guildhall in Westgate, whilst Llanthony Priory held a court for its own tenants.[423] The authorities in Gloucester favoured the use of public humiliation or fines in cases of illicit sexual activity. In 1483, Gloucester was granted a charter by Richard II which changed the constitution of the town's government: instead of four bailiffs Gloucester would follow London's model and have a mayor, aldermen and common council.[424] A pillory was to be set up in the market place, as it had been in London. The stocks and pillory stood near market trade in Southgate Street, adjacent to *Love Lane* (the importance of which will be discussed below), making punishments extremely public.[425]

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[420] Ibid., pp. 179-80. Butler argues that in some cases, women in Medieval England argued that they were pregnant to avoid the death sentence. See Butler, p. 384.

[421] Kirkpatrick, p. 39 and Henry Manship, *The History of Great Yarmouth*, ed. by C. Palmer (Louis Alfred Meall., The Quay & J. Russell Smith: London, 1854), p. 60.

[422] Manship, p. 176.

[423] N. M. Herbert, 'Medieval Gloucester: The Later Middle Ages' in *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 4, the City of Gloucester* (1988) 35-41 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol4/pp35-41> [accessed 11 July 2019] p. 35-41.

[424] Heighway, p. 96.

[425] Ibid., p. 90.

A topographical survey of Colchester, Bury, Great Yarmouth, Shrewsbury and Gloucester: how were market towns set up and were certain areas synonymous with 'illicit sex'?

Sex on Bereslane, Colchester

Building in Colchester in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had led to nine known inns and taverns, eight of which existed on the High Street, with one inside the market place, and all of which were of two storeys.[426] In his research on Colchester, Britnell suggests that by the 1400s, there were a total of fifteen to twenty taverns and thirteen inns for travellers.[427] The richest citizens lived in St Runwald's and St Nicholas' parishes, both located near the High Street, with the southern parishes such as Holy Trinity, St Mary at the Walls and St Mary Magdalene's being poorest.[428] A common market was held every day of the week in the fifteenth century, although claims in 1452 and 1464 that the market was held 'everywhere', suggest that it was somewhat disorganised.[429]

There was no sexually infamous street name in use in Colchester, but another street, *Bereslane*, was associated with prostitution. *Bereslane*, or *Berislane*, between 1312 and 1504 (today known as Vineyard Street), was located south of the High Street, on the route out of town to St Botolph's priory, but was inside the town walls, in a poorer part of the town (see Cooper's map below). The street was next to South Gate, and as will be discussed further later, may have been the town's designated site for prostitution throughout the 1370s.[430] If this was the case, the location of the street would have moved those engaging in illicit sex away from the market and High Street, but would have been accessible to clerics from the priory and travellers entering via South Gate. Differing from other towns, prostitution in Colchester seems to have taken place more noticeably on the southern outskirts, where the residents may have been poorer, but prostitutes had easy access to travellers.

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[426] Cooper, p. 44. Hare states that in 1400, Colchester actually had thirteen inns. See Hare, p. 485.
[427] Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525*, p. 131.
[428] Cooper, p. 46
[429] Ibid., pp. 269-70.
[430] Ibid., pp. 372-4. See cases of Katherine Kytlyng and others later in this chapter.

Map of medieval Colchester, demonstrating the southern location of Beres Lane, like Norwich, and its proximity to the High Street. From J. Cooper, *A History of the county of Essex, vol IX: The Borough of Colchester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 373.
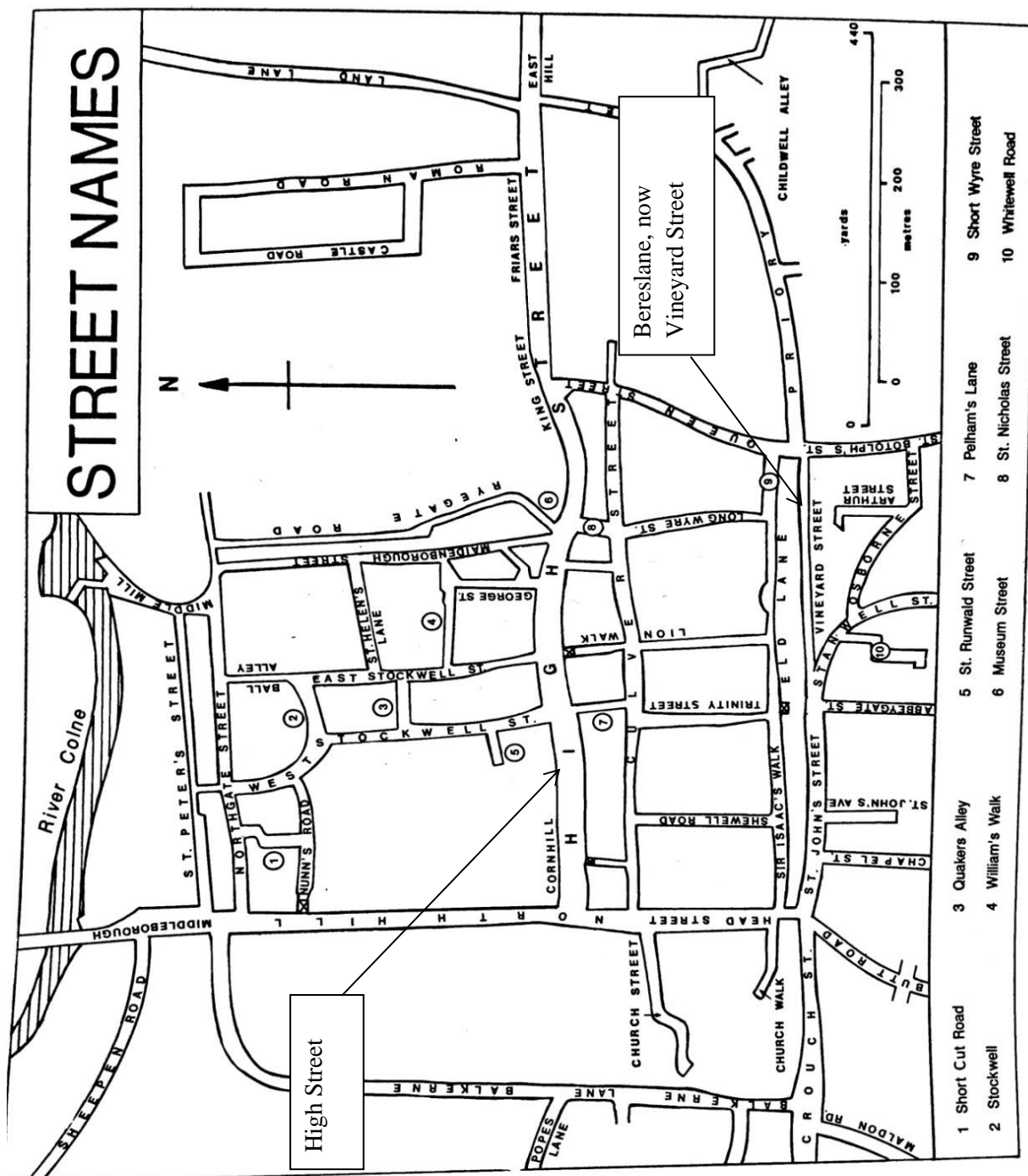
Bury St Edmunds

Bury was split into five wards, one named after each gate: North, South, East, West and Risby Gate wards. Eastward was the smallest and poorest, with Southgate ward being the richest by the end of the thirteenth century. Risbygate Ward was the most densely populated and was built along a grid plan. The 'Great Market', Tolhouse and borough gaol were all located there.[431] In Bury, the abbot had powers much like a sheriff: he held the view of the frankpledge, tried pleas of the crown, imprisoned and hanged criminals and appointed his own justices.[432] The town would not have its own government until after the abbey was closed in 1539, and had five hospitals.[433] Although Bury had no sexually named streets, the monks were accused of illicit sexual relationships (as will be discussed further) and therefore much of the evidence from Bury is focused inside the town walls, around St Edmundsbury Abbey. The abbey, one of the richest and most powerful in England, was located in the centre of the town, south of the market, with the River Lark and town ditch providing a natural border on the eastern side. There was apparently a tavern located immediately opposite the abbey gate, on Putlers Rowe. The great market was located around a five minute walk away, in Risbygate ward, on the western side of the town, inside the town walls but with immediate access to Risby Gate. The gaol house and toll house were located there, with the guildhall situated just south of the market.

Gropecunt Lane, Great Yarmouth

Like Norwich and Oxford, Great Yarmouth had a *Gropecunte Lane*, which was located inside the town walls in the northern end of the town, next to Northgate Street, the town's market place and the great parish church of St Nicholas, within close proximity to the Denes (a vast beachy area to the east of the town), as can be seen in the map below. As will be seen, this area was the designated refuge for both prostitutes and lepers. John Potter's work on the wall of Great Yarmouth shows that the lane was inside the town walls and close to the Northgate, and therefore would have been easily accessible to travellers.[434] The lane was apparently in use from 1299, and therefore is

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[431] Gottfried, pp. 26-30.
[432] *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, 1212-1301*, ed. by. A. Gransden (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1964), p. xii. The chronicle was written in the second half of the thirteenth century and was the work of three monks.
[433] *VCH*, *Suffolk*, II, p. 134-5.
[434] J. P. Potter, *The Medieval Town Wall of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, A Geological Perlustration* (Oxford: BAR British Series 461, 2008), p. 6.

one of the earliest such lanes to be attested. The name continued to be used until at least 1514, when it was last documented.[435] Sandred also discusses *Grope Lane*, saying 'Northgate Street is named from a gate in the town wall […] and somewhere here was the situation of a street of frequent occurrence in the documents, *Gropecuntelane*… In the post-medieval period it became *Gropelane* then *Cross Row*. This was at the northern end of the town.'[436] The Cartulary of St Mary's Hospital in Great Yarmouth also mentions the lane, in a grant on 5 January 1398 of rents and property made by William Oxney and John Howlyn to support inmates of the hospital. At that time, John of Riston, smith, paid 9d in yearly rent for a tenement which 'lyeth betweene the common lane on the south and the land once of Ricard Broun, barker on the north and abutteth on the land of the said Richard towardes the east and on Gropecuntlane towardes the west.[437] The same thoroughfare appears again in a later entry in the cartulary, named 'Gropekontlane.' This section, in a different hand and apparently added later, dates the rental as 23 April 1398, prior to the original document.[438]

Great Yarmouth: Other areas of concern

Did public health concerns affect the town's topography? As in Norwich, maintaining public health in Great Yarmouth was both a moral and physical problem. Yarmouth had two noticeable hospitals related to public health: St Mary's and the so called *Lazar House*.[439] The *Lazar Houses*, named after St Lazarus, were fairly common in the fourteenth century as houses set up to hold lepers, usually away from the main town. In Great Yarmouth, these houses were set up outside the town walls, and contained two separate houses for either sex. There were certainly two separate houses at the North Gate of the town, near *Gropecunt Lane*, by the 1530s, as these were reportedly taken into possession by the corporation which appointed a warden to

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[435] Keith Briggs, 'OE and ME *Cunte* in Place-Names', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 41, (2009), 1-19 (p. 4), <http://keithbriggs.info/documents/cunte_04.pdf> [accessed 11 July 2019].
[436] Karl Sandred and Bengt Lindstrom, *The Place Names of Norfolk Part II; The Hundreds of East and West Flegg, Happing and Tunstead* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 1996), p. 32.
[437] *OWL*, MS Gough. Norfolk. 20, fol. 53.
[438] *OWL*, MS Gough. Norfolk. 20, fol. 66. Carole Rawcliffe, ed. 'The Cartulary of St Mary's Hospital, Great Yarmouth', in *Poverty and Wealth: Sheep, Taxation and Charity in Late Medieval Norfolk*, ed. by M. Bailey, M. Jurkowski and C. Rawcliffe (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 2007), p. 204, 219.
[439] *Valor Ecclesiasticus, Temp. Henr. VIII. Auctoritate Regia. Institutus. Vol III*, ed. by J. Caley and J. Hunter (London: His Majesty King George III, 1817), 6 vols (1810-34), vol III (1817), p. 296. In 1354, a petition to Pope Innocent VI requested he authorise the relaxation of a year and forty days penance to any who visited the hospital or the relics, or who gave 'a helping hand to the poor inhabitants thereof.' See *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland. Petitions to the Pope, Vol I, A.D. 1342- 1419*, ed. by W. H. Bliss (London: H. M. S. O., 1896), p. 263.

them.[440] Overall, concerns about public health did affect the topography of the town, as prostitutes and lepers were sent to the Denes outside the town walls, which may be why *Gropecunt Lane* lay near the town walls and had direct access to the Northern Gate.[441]

Sex workers and their clients may have further been attracted to Great Yarmouth because of its port, to the south east of the Denes. In his work *Mapping the Migrants*, Laughton concluded that prostitution flourished around harbours. His case study of Chester demonstrated that poor immigrants to port towns may have supplemented their income by running low key brothels.[442] Manship claims that whilst the ports in Yarmouth could be economically beneficial, it also made the people who dwelled there 'hard to govern' because the aliens had different manners and customs, and a life at sea had made them 'tough'.[443] If alien and immigrant women were attracted to ports to engage in prostitution, Great Yarmouth would have been an obvious choice; as well as being one of the wealthiest urban centres in England, attempts to invade from the sea often meant that extra naval officers lodged in Yarmouth to protect the country. For example, in 1386, 900 men were assigned to Great Yarmouth under Henry Percy to stop a French invasion, and in 1402, sixty men at arms and archers stayed three whole days in Great Yarmouth. In addition, the port was believed to have attracted pirates who may have frequented brothels on arriving in English towns, such as those who ravaged the Norfolk coastline in 1395.[444]


[440] *VCH, Norfolk,* II, p. 453 and Manship, p. 433.
[441] For more on how immorality affected street cleaning, see previous chapter on Cathedral Towns and Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 15.
[442] Laughton found that between 1475 and 1476, brothels in Chester were recorded in Northgate Street, Eastgate Street, Bridge Street and Watergate Street. See J. Laughton, 'Mapping the Migrants: Welsh, Manx and Irish Settlers in Fifteenth Century Chester' in *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester 1200-1600* ed. by C. Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 175.
[443] Manship, p. 135-6.
[444] Blomefield, pp. 82-87.

Great Yarmouth in the late thirteenth century, showing Grope Lane where prostitutes did reside, and the Denes where they were supposed to reside alongside lepers. From J. P. Potter, *The Medieval Town Wall of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, A Geological Perlustration* (Oxford: BAR British Series 461, 2008), p. 6.
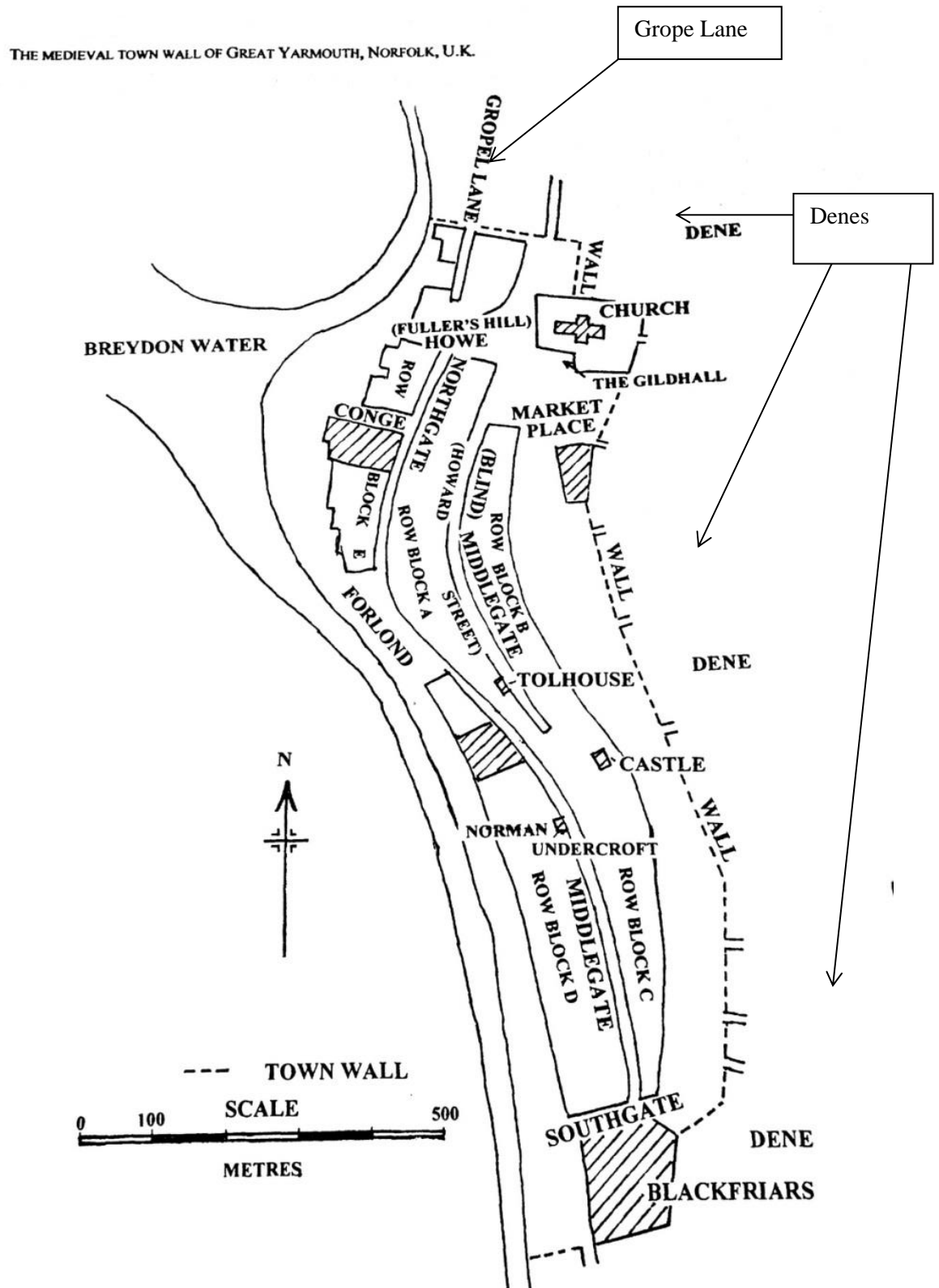
Shrewsbury and Grope Lane

Shrewsbury's abbey was rebuilt in the fourteenth century, and the town had several parish churches, such as St Chad's and St Mary's, though there were also Austin, Franciscan and Dominican friaries. [445] Between 1445 and 1475, the town could number eighteen inns (some of which were probably alehouses), but the number had reduced to twelve by 1520. The wealthiest residents resided inside the town walls, near the High Street (which was in Stone Ward), and in Mardol in the Welsh Ward, with the poorer residents living in the suburbs.[446] In 1261, the market was moved from the churchyard of St Alkmund and Juliana to the High Street, in an area known as 'the square', which had Chepe Strete in the southwest corner between 1332 and 1469, and a guildhall from at least 1324.[447] In her work on the place names of Shropshire, Gelling suggests that, like Gloucester, the guildhall may have been referred to as 'market stall' which suggests that trade was more important in Shrewsbury than civic business.[448]

Shrewsbury too had a *Grope Lane*. It remains the only town studied in this thesis in which the name still exists today. The name was certainly in use by 1324, when it was recorded as *Grope Countelane*.[449] Versions of the name varied throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and it was recorded as *Grope lone* in 1340, *Grope conte lone* in 1389, *Grope lane* in 1404, *Le Gropelone* in 1418, *Le Grope Lane* in 1419, *Groplone* in 1434, and finally *Grope cunt Lane* in 1559.[450]

The origin for this name has been hotly disputed in Shrewsbury. Some local historians have argued that the lane's name is not sexually explicit, which may be due to embarrassment. Writing on Shrewsbury in the 1950s, Hobbs argues against the lane's name having sexual connotations, saying 'this is a name often applied to a dark, narrow alley, through which one groped ones way. In Shrewsbury this thoroughfare still retains its medieval character. York has a *Grope lane*, as have Peterborough, Oxford and Northampton.'[451] However, Margaret Gelling argued against this, saying 'The reference

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[445] Champion and Thacker, ed. p. 117. For more on the abbey, see H. Owen and J. B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury, Vol II* (London: Harding, Lepard & Co., 1825), p. 1.

[446] Champion and Thacker, ed. pp. 117-132.

[447] *Cal CR: Henry III, A.D. 1259-1261* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1934), p. 351. The close rolls state that on 24 February, 1261, a complaint was made about the market's close proximity to the cemetery of SS Alkmund and Juliana, which is why it was moved.

[448] Gelling, p. 16.

[449] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 210. Here they cite *Raby Castle Deeds 1/25/9a-b, ref courtesy W. A Champion*. Holt and Baker argue that this is the earliest recorded version of the name, which continued in use until 1561.

[450] Gelling, p. 5 and Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', pp. 311-350 (pp. 321-3).

[451] Hobbs, p. 56.

is to sexual intercourse, not, as Hobbs politely suggests, to the necessity to grope one's way along a dark, narrow alley.'[452] Hobbs' argument is also undermined by the size of *Grope Lane* in Hereford. Hobbs' view mimics those of other twentieth-century historians already discussed, who attempted to hide or diminish the sexual nature of these streets. This is also true of the nineteenth-century historian Hugh Owen, who, when writing in the 1800s, called the street 'Grope, or the *Dark* Lane'.[453] Thomas Phillips and John Brickdale Blakeway, writing in the eighteenth century, also attempted to hide any sexual connections to the street. Phillips simply remarks 'see accounts of Austin's Priory' when discussing the lane and in his section on ancient names for present streets he omits *Grope Lane* entirely.[454] Blakeway likewise diminished the name's sexual nature, suggesting that it was derived 'from its obscurity and narrowness'.[455] Hobbs further suggests that according to a local paper, the 'Foxall Gazette', the lane was also called *Boot Lane*, although this is not reflected in other records of the street and seems to undermine his belief in 'groping one's way'.[456] The *Victoria County History* for Shropshire disagrees, stating 'the street name, indicating a haunt of prostitutes, is a rare survival of one common in medieval English towns. Such lanes nearly always ran off a market-place or street… and so provided a suitable rendezvous for traders and market visitors seeking sex.'[457] Holt and Baker comment on modern perspectives of the name, saying 'in Shrewsbury the name Grope Lane survives to this day, although it is generally explained by town guides and histories in terms of feeling one's way along a dark and narrow thoroughfare'.[458] Overall, it seems likely that twentieth-century and local historians have tried to make the name seem ambiguous, in an attempt to hide any sexually illicit past.

Interestingly, Gelling's research reveals that although there were many commonly used street names found in Shrewsbury (such as Fish Street), there was also 'an above-average number of names apparently unique to Shrewsbury', such as

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[452] Gelling, p. 5.

[453] Owen, *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury,* p. 531.

[454] T. Phillips, *The History and Antiquities of Shrewsbury: From its first Foundation to the present Time* (Shrewsbury: T. Wood, 1779), pp. 64-5.

[455] Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', pp. 311-350 (pp. 321).

[456] Hobbs, p. 56.

[457] Champion and Thacker, ed. p. 80. The *Victoria County History* marks this date as 1304, but this is questioned by other historical works which all date it as 1324. Although Worcester had a Grope Lane, it has not been included in this thesis. Grope Lane in Worcester was within the town's walls, extended twenty-seven metres into the quay and was dominated by the Church of All Saints. For more on Grope Lane in Worcester, see Nigel Baker and Richard Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church: Gloucester and Worcester* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 175-207.

[458] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 210.

Cockbitestrete, which was in existence from at least 1255 and lay in the Welsh Ward. Although it could be a reference to cock fighting, there is no convincing argument, at present, for the name's origin.[459] These uncommon street names make the existence and longevity of *Grope Lane* even more striking, as Shrewsbury was not a large town and included uncommonly used street names, yet *Grope Lane* survived.

Other street names in Shrewsbury may assist in establishing the likelihood that sexual activity was the cause of the name *Grope Lane*. As has been seen, street names were often descriptive; they described the activity or occupation taking place there. *Butcher Row* for example was originally *Le Flesshomeles* in 1282, and also went by the names *Flessheweresrewe* and *La Bocherewe* throughout the fourteenth century. *Le Flesshomeles* or 'flesh shambles' was the term given to a stall selling meat, showing that butchers and meat sellers were prevalent on this road from at least the thirteenth century.[460] Likewise, the High Street, which connected the old market to *Grope Lane*, was originally called *Gumbelstolestrete*, which was a reference to the ducking stool originally situated there (potentially as a deliberate attempt to prevent criminal activity in the market), although the stool was moved to St John's Hill after the 1300s. Additionally, bakers could be found at *Baksterys Rewe* or 'Baker's Row', which formed part of the High Street from at least 1361.[461] This trend for descriptive street names may encourage the idea that *Gropecunt Lane* was an indication of sexual activity.

As in Oxford, Great Yarmouth and Norwich, *Grope Lane* in Shrewsbury was predominately a small alleyway. The street was located in the centre of the town, inside the town walls, and faced the large church of St Alkmund's at the northern end of the lane (see map below). St Martin's chapel stood on the west side of *Grope Lane* by 1100, although its history otherwise is relatively unknown.[462] Importantly, the lane connected the town's two principal markets, King's Market and Cornmarket off the High Street.[463] Unlike other towns, *Grope Lane* in Shrewsbury was apparently home to some of the wealthiest citizens. Blakeway stressed: 'repulsive as it must appear to modern ideas of refinement, some persons of great note in their day, did not disdain to reside in this narrow and confined situation.'[464] In 1280, the merchant Richard Stury lived there.[465]

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[459] Other uncommon street names included *Shoplatch* and *Waxchere* inside the town walls, and *The Gay* in the suburbs. See Gelling, p. xix and p. 24.
[460] Ibid., p. 3.
[461] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[462] Champion and Thacker, ed. p. 11 and p. 72.
[463] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 210.
[464] Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', pp. 311-350 (pp. 321).

Sir Roger Acton, favoured by Richard II and Henry IV, had land on the lane until he left for Oldcastle's rebellion in 1414. His widow, Alice Acton, was still there in 1425, and the tenement appears to have remained with the family for several years, until it was sold in 1484 to Edward Esthop.[466]

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[465] Cromarty, p. 17.
[466] Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', pp. 311-350 (pp. 322-3). See also *Papers relating to tenements in Le Bakerrowe, Salop,* Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, 6000/ 6276.

Map of medieval Shrewsbury, demonstrating the central location of Grope Lane, and its close proximity to the High Street. From Dorothy Cromarty, *Everyday Life in Medieval Shrewsbury* (Shropshire: Shropshire Books, 1991)
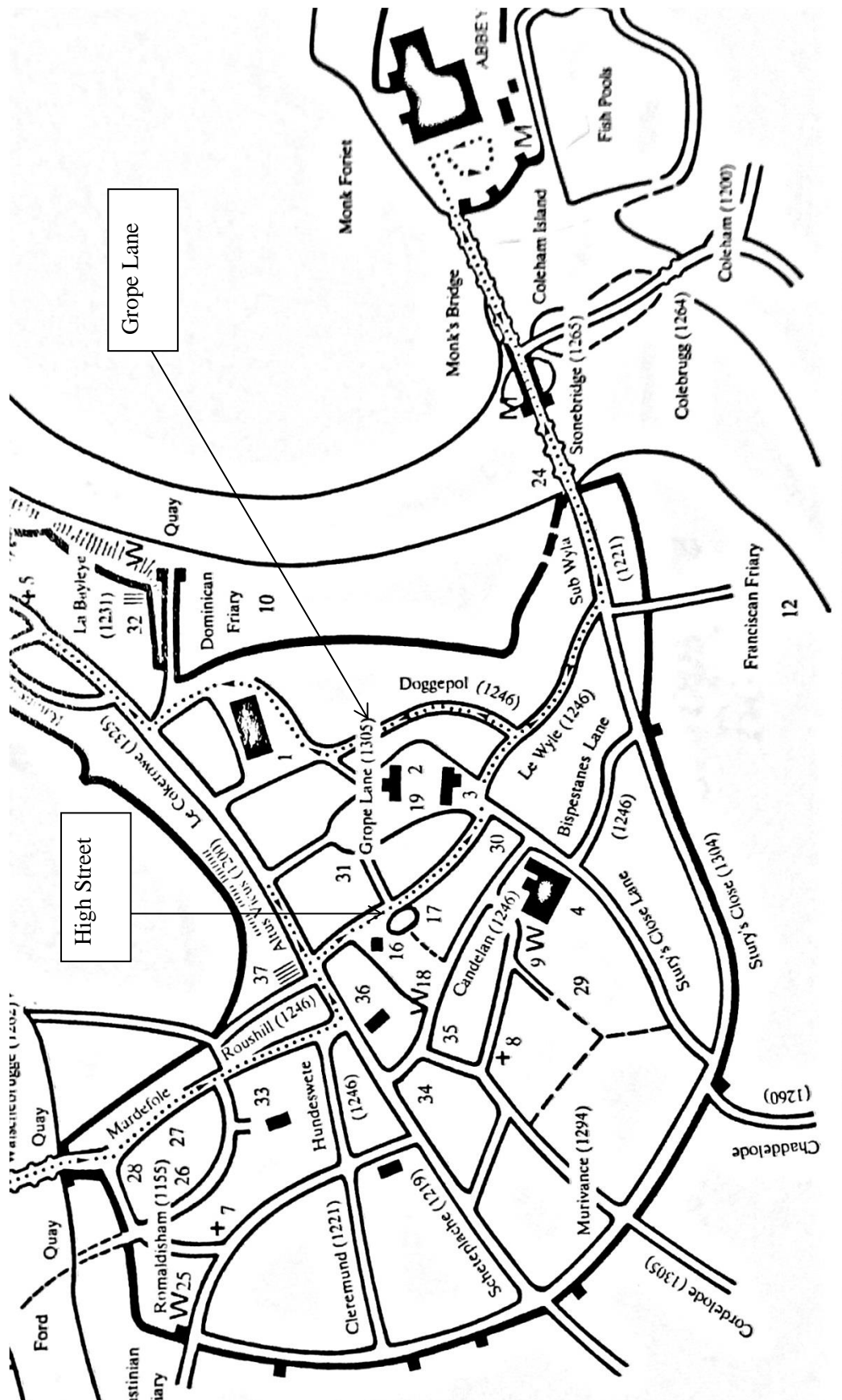
The topography of Love Lane, Gloucester

By the 1500s Gloucester had eleven parishes, the poorest of which were located in the north eastern suburbs and the richest found around the central and lower parts of Westgate Street in the centre of the town.[467]

Although Gloucester did not have a *Gropecunt Lane*, it had a sexually named street too: *Love Lane*, the topography and size of which resembled other sexualised streets, and may be indicative of sexual activity.[468] In their research on place names in Bristol, Richard Cates and Jennifer Scherr discovered that London had four *Love Lanes* by the 1390s, and Bristol had one from the 1370s, in addition to the lanes emerging in Reading, Chester, Shaftesbury and Salisbury. They argue that these were common throughout English towns, and their research suggests that these streets were dark or crooked and secluded, like *Grope Lanes*, although many towns had both a *Love Lane* and a *Grope Lane*. Additionally, like *Grope Lanes*, these streets were often renamed. In Bristol, for example, the street was later renamed *Rose Lane*. Overall, they conclude 'most *Love Lanes* had the more literal [sexual] origin, for two reasons: firstly for its natural appropriateness, and secondly when any initial humour had worn off and the names were simply available "ready-made" for a lane of a certain appearance or use.'[469]

The origins of the lane in Gloucester are unclear. A book containing a terrier of lands belonging to Llanthony Priory, c.1445, holds information on 231 plots from roughly the twelfth century to 1443, and was drawn up to prevent land disputes. It has been carefully conserved and is in a surprisingly good condition at the National Archives. The terrier discusses the southern part of the town and the nearby *Gor Lane*, but fails to mention *Love Lane*, indicating that it may not have existed in the 1440s, or that it was to be avoided.[470] The *Victoria County History* offers little analysis of the lane's origin, although does tell us that it was in existence by 1714. It ran between Upper Westgate Street and Cross Keys Lane and became known as Fox Entry in 1855, before being changed to Mercers Entry in 1875, and then disappearing from use.[471]

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[467] Heighway, p. 95.
[468] Bristol too had a *Love Lane*, see Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 208.
[469] Coates and Scherr, 'Some Place-Names in Medieval and Early-Modern Bristol', 155-196 (p. 163). John Stow reported that *Love Lane* in Tudor London was lined with brothels. See Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 202.
[470] *TNA*, C115/73.
[471] *VCH*, *Gloucester*, IV, p. 65.

Herbert suggests that Westgate Street was 'the most important street' in the town because of its proximity to the bridge across the River Severn, which gave Gloucester control of the route into South Wales. This seems validated by the fact that the street attracted a great deal of local trade, and by the twelfth century the upper part had become the principal market place in Gloucester. In addition, the expansion of the area led to two churches being built there, St Mary de Grace and Holy Trinity. The Guildhall also stood further along the street, acting as a market hall and the centre of administration. The market place therefore was irregularly shaped, surrounded on the north side by Gloucester Abbey, with two parish churches and an intensively built-up area between Holy Trinity Church and the precinct wall. The lane incorporated part of the richest parish (St Nicholas') in the 1500s, and the east side of the lane was straight, whereas the west side was irregular (see maps below). [472] Baker and Holt conclude that this likely meant that the east side followed a property boundary whereas the west side was formed of buildings facing it.[473]

By the 1450s, Gloucester had at least ten inns on the main street catering to travellers, including 'New Inn', built in 1455, which is still trading, and which lay close to *Love Lane*.[474] Finally there were also two colleges of secular clerics in close proximity, on Hare Lane and Gore Lane to the north of New Inn.[475] Although it was not called *Gropecunt Lane*, as we find commonly in other towns, *Love Lane* in Gloucester therefore conformed to the same patterns that we associate with *Grope Lanes*; it was located in a densely populated area, near a market place, with easy access to churches and within the town walls. In this sense, it would seem likely that *Love Lane* would have been a location for illicit sex, just as might be expected of *Gropecunt Lanes*. Baker and Holt use this idea to argue that the lane was likely in existence prior to 1714, arguing that 'narrow lanes or alleys with identical or related (but equally suggestive) names, and with precisely the relationship to the principal market street or market place seen here are widely paralleled in other English medieval towns from the thirteenth

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[472] Herbert, 'Medieval Gloucester: The Later Middle Ages', the records show that Holy Trinity was the fourth richest parish in Gloucester.
[473] Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval* Church, p. 57.
[474] Heighway, p. 85 and Hare, p. 485.
[475] Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800,* p. 11.

century onwards… the combination of their names - often far more sexually explicit than here - and their position implies their use as places for casual sexual encounters.'[476]

It is notable that the lane was not situated in the poorer north-eastern part of the town. Although the girls, being poor, may have come from there, the lane evolved in the richest part of Gloucester, and therefore nearer the wealthier clients as well as a constant stream of tradesmen and travellers. As with Shrewsbury, sexual activity taking place on *Love Lane* would mimic occupational streets in other areas in Gloucester, such as the ironworkers being located on *Smiths Street*, the archdeacon living on *Archdeacons Lane*, ironmongers on *Ironmongers Row* and smiths on *Longsmith Street*. In the cases of both towns, streets developed names that indicated the activity or occupation taking place there, so it seems likely that this to would have been the case for *Love Lane*.

A topographical study of Gloucester is possible because a number of records and registers have survived from Llanthony Priory. At least six registers survive, and suggest that Llanthony Priory was possibly the richest Augustinian houses in England by the time of its dissolution in 1538.[477] The terrier of Llanthony Priory, which contains information on lands belonging to the priory of Llanthony Secunda near Gloucester (alongside extracts of wills), shows that of the fifty or so tenants of Llanthony's houses in 1443, at least fifteen were women.[478] Baker and Holt suggest that these were probably widows, with no landed wealth to sustain them, and that they 'would have made a living in the traditional ways open to urban women: as hucksters or petty retailers, as brewers or as alewives retailing ale purchased from the common brewers or by letting cheap lodgings or by prostitution.'[479] However, the terrier only describes five of these women as 'widows'. Among the other women listed, one woman named Tibota Parker was listed as renting an inn on plot 16 (see map below) and probably worked as an innkeeper, whilst another, Agnes Kyng, had inherited the tenancy from her father.[480]

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[476] Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval* Church, p. 57. Baker and Holt do not explain the 'far more sexually explicit' names although we may conclude they are referring to *Gropecunt Lane*.
[477] See Rhodes, *A Calendar of the Registers of the Priory of Llanthony*, pp. 1-15. Rhodes has also produced an extremely useful set of maps detailing the plots held by Llanthony Priory, which are accessible online. See John Rhodes, 'Terrier of Llanthony Priory 1443- Maps', *The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 30 <https://www.bgas.org.uk/publications/Llanthonymaps/llantIndex.html>l [accessed 11 July 2019].
[478] Richard Steymor and Robert Cole, *Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester, 1443*, trans. by John Rhodes (Bristol: The Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2016), *passim.*
[479] Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church*, p. 342.
[480] *Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester, 1443*, pp. 20, 315. Kyng's tenancy is shown in the terrier on map 13, plot 147, to the north east of the town. I have not included the map here as it offers little else topographically. Hare states that most female innkeepers were widows who held the inn until their remarriage or death. See Hare, p. 495.

The annual sum for tenancies paid by these women ranged from 16d to 9s per year, and included cottages, shops and other land.

Although Love Lane is not mentioned as having any property belonging to the priory, the neighbouring lanes of Gor (Bull) Lane and Scrud Lane are both noted, but not with female tenants (see Baker and Holt's map below for the location of these). Instead, male chaplains such as John Pollard are noted for renting in Gor Lane, whilst John, a prior, is noted as renting a tenement on Scrud Lane. Of course, these men could easily make up the clientele of prostitutes, but it is disappointing that the women noted cannot be traced to the area specifically. At least five women in the terrier were listed as having rented tenements in Ebrugge (Westgate) Street, at least one of these being hardly more than 160 metres away from *Love Lane*. The women paid between four and ten shillings for their tenements, but no job or title is given to them in the terrier, including that of 'widow'.[481] In other cases, it is evident that the renters of these tenements were reasonably wealthy, and therefore would not have needed to become sex workers.[482] In conclusion, if these women were widows earning via the 'traditional female domestic roles' (including prostitution) as Baker and Holt suggest, they were in the right place topographically.

Overall, it seems likely that *Love Lane* in Gloucester would have attracted illicit sex. However, it is problematic because there is no evidence that *Love Lane* in Gloucester existed prior to 1714. Despite this, the list of similarities this street shared with those previously mentioned, such as their locations within the towns and their sexualised names, seems far too high a coincidence not to be indicative of illicit sex.

The topography of punishment in Gloucester

For those found guilty of engaging in illicit sex in Gloucester, the location of punishment was important. Topographically, those sent to the stock or pillory were placed in a particularly busy area: the market, which lay close to *Love Lane*. This is unlikely to have been a coincidence, acting instead as a deliberate deterrent for wrongdoers. For women who were found to be engaging in prostitution, topography

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[481] *TNA*, C115/73

[482] Marianne Wilson discusses this further in her review of the terrier. See M. Wilson, 'Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester 1443', *Archives and Records: The Journal of the Archives and Records Association*, 38 (2017), 324-325 (p. 325), whereby a female tenant of plot 87a in Westgate street, neighbouring Love Lane, was described as having one of the most powerful men in Gloucester as her father-in-law. This tenement became the 'Fleece Inn' in 1534.

again played a part in their punishments; the women were publicly humiliated by being driven throughout the wards of the town, so that residents in all areas could be deterred.

Overall, the market towns of Bury, Colchester, Great Yarmouth, Shrewsbury and Gloucester, resemble the topographies of the other towns studied, which show the importance of the market regardless of the town type. Although it was even more important for the authorities to prevent immoral activity around the market place, all five towns had other areas within the town walls which may well have been notorious areas for illicit sex.

Map showing various plots in Gloucester, demonstrating the location of Tibota Parker's Inn on Plot 16. From *Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester, 1443*, p. xxxiv.
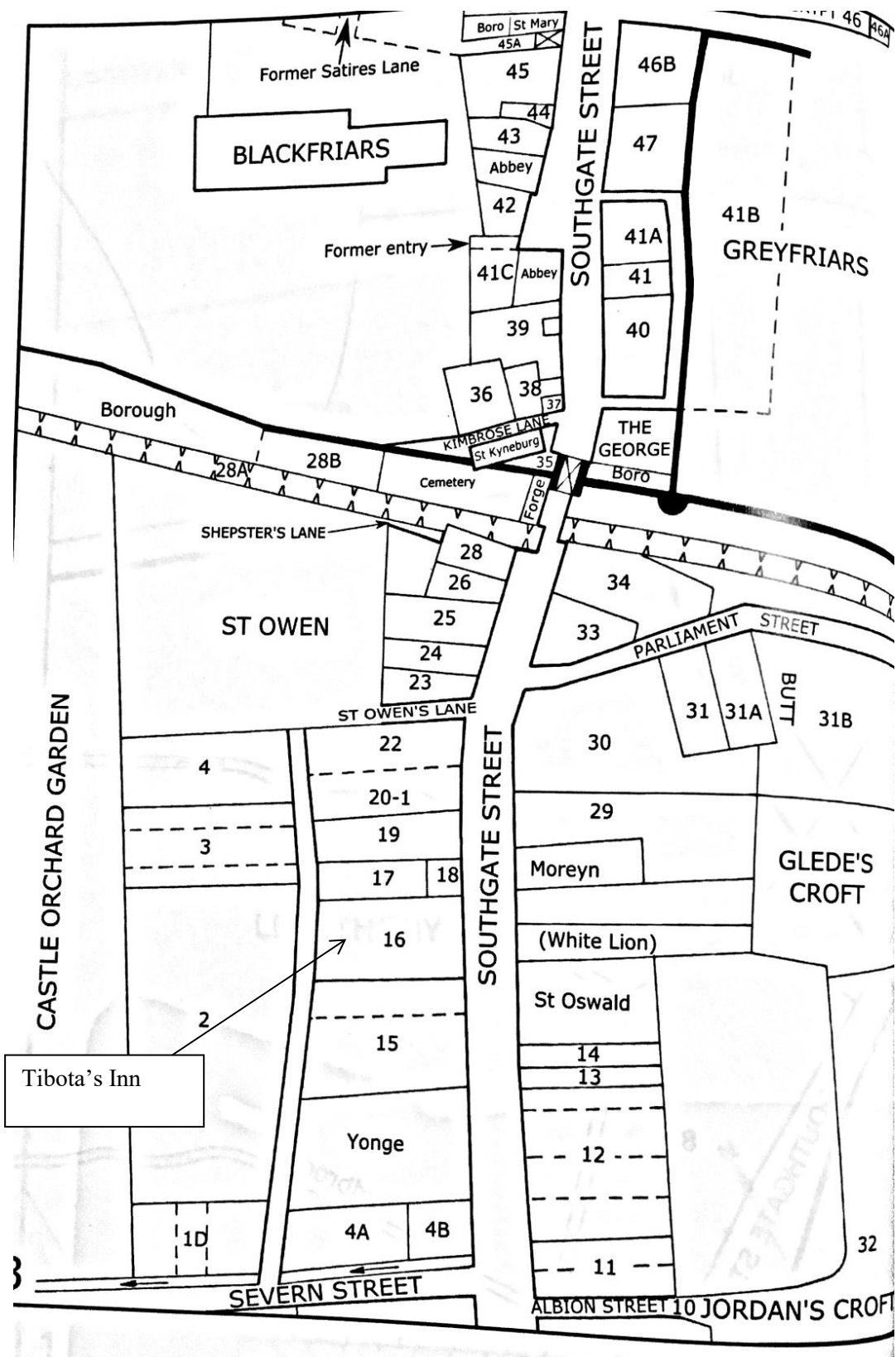
Map demonstrating the small size of Love Lane in Gloucester, and its surrounding streets. From Baker and Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church*, p. 54.
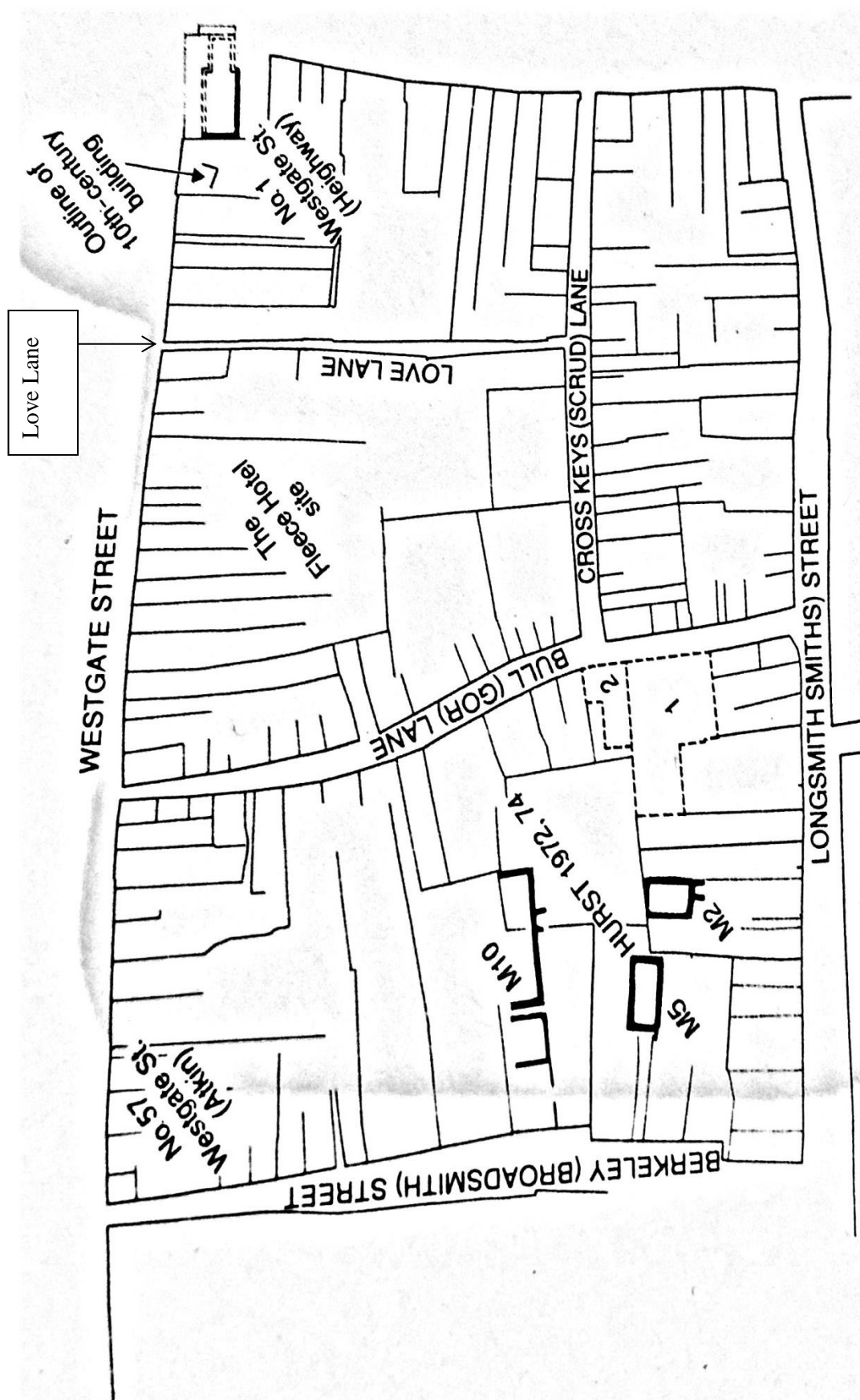
Map showing the built up area surrounding Love Lane, and demonstrating its similarity to Grope Lanes. From *Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester, 1443*, p. xxxviii.
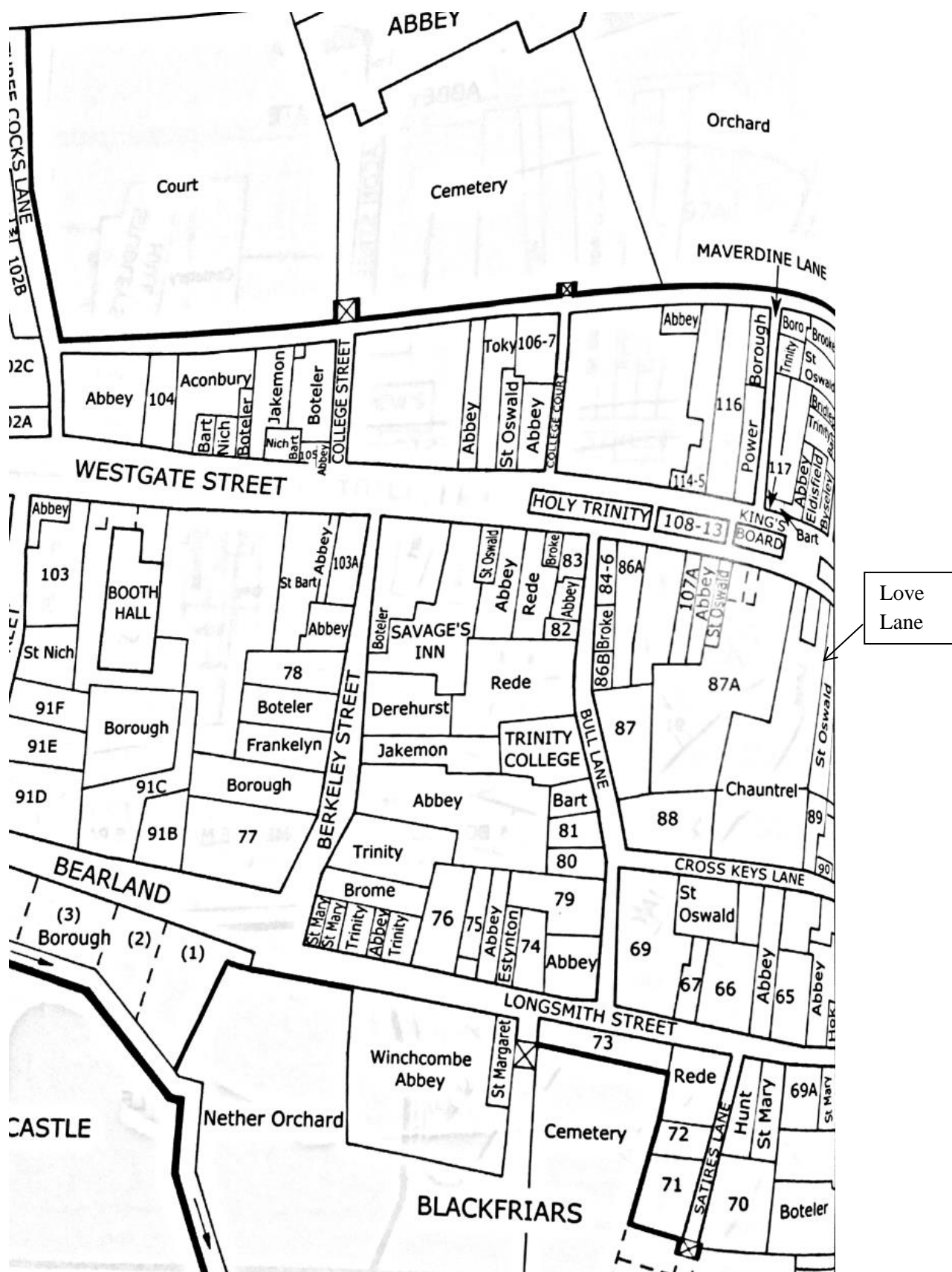
Ordinances and Punishments: how effectively did authorities deal with concerns about illicit sex?

In towns where the markets where especially important, sanctions attempted to prevent brothels from developing, and many ordinances banned houses from harbouring women of 'ill repute'. Hostellers and alewives in market towns came under closest scrutiny, especially because of the supposed (and real) link between alcohol and bad behaviour. The concern over sexual morality and hostellers increased after the Black Death in 1348, when there was a growth in the number of taverns and inns.[483] Davis argues that the fifteenth century was an 'important' period for the development of taverns, which led to specific legislation in Colchester (alongside York and King's Lynn), 'to forbid brothels being established and to prevent common tapsters from frequenting inns'. This was encouraged by the concern about 'strangers' (or travellers to the market) staying at the public inns, which were often associated with vagabondry and other crimes.[484]

Gloucester

The town authorities in Gloucester were certainly concerned about illicit sex taking place in the town, and strict regulations attempted to prevent this. The corporation records of Gloucester show that the authorities felt the need to punish clerics, priests and common laypeople, in an attempt to restore order, because the town had apparently become notoriously scandalous because of the 'exceeding number of common strumpets and bawds'. The *Records of the Corporation of Gloucester* from 1500 and 1504 reported that common strumpets and bawds must be 'exited' from the town otherwise God would 'cast his great vengeance on the said town.'[485] The town authorities wanted to mimic punishments of the 'worshipful' cities of London and Bristol, and decided that 'acconvenyent which' or hutch, would be put up 'in the commyn market place before the fest of Lammas next commyng for the punyssh them, as well as of wedded men as of prestes and other commyn qwenys, whether she be

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[483] Davis attributes this growth to a 'decline in private and charitable hospitality after the Black Death', alongside 'increased standards of living, the proliferation of petty consumption and the mobile nature of society', which combined led to an increase in need for Inns and Taverns as 'focal points for social activities'. See Davis, p. 336.

[484] Ibid.

[485] *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX: The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort, K.G., The Earl of Donoughmore, and others*, The Historical Manuscripts Commission (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1891), p. 435

mannys wyf or single woman.'[486] It was further ordained that once the sheriffs had been informed of prostitutes living to 'the opyn fame and knowleg of the comynaltye', the women would immediately be put in a cart belonging to 'the commyn halyers' of Gloucester, 'so that they may be conveyed frome ward to ward', and furthermore that whilst in the cart, they would be distinguished 'with frontelettes of papyr and ray hodes.'[487] To summarise, they stressed that all prostitutes should be publicly humiliated, by being placed in a cart and driven from ward to ward, wearing a striped hood and holding a sign confirming their guilt.[488] 'Striped hoods' were of course also used in Great Yarmouth to differentiate prostitutes from respectable women within the town, and the women in the carts of Gloucester would therefore have been instantly recognisable as sex workers.

The ordinance goes on to say that for every trip made, the cart owner would earn four pence from the sheriffs or eleven pence if they were required to leave other work. Furthermore, the sheriffs of Gloucester should be present at the humiliation along with their officers 'uppon payne of xls', which would be paid to the stewards of Gloucester for the reparation of the town walls.[489] The authorities seemed keen that any payment levied through fines in cases of sexual misconduct would be used for the town's benefit. Further ordinances also levied fines for those found interacting with, or facilitating prostitutes. The records went on to decree that if any person from thereon kept a 'bawd' within their house, the women would have a single day to leave the town. If they did not leave after being told to do so and were instead found to be living with the town's burgesses or inhabitants, those found assisting the women would be fined twelve pence 'toward the reparacion of the walles of the towne, to be levyed by the Stewardes as abovesaide.'[490]

Great Yarmouth

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[486] Ibid., p. 435. Ingram notes that these 'hutches' were portioned to divide the men from the women. See Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 136. Ingram's research uses evidence from London, Southwark and York, and is predominately focused on the period after 1500.

[487] This is another example of how physical appearance was important for the authorities to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' women. Ingram argues that these placards likely carried a note of the offense committed, whereas the 'ray hodes' were striped hoods that mimicked those commonly prescribed to convicted prostitutes in London (and Great Yarmouth). See Ingram, p. 136. Rawcliffe calls these women 'shaven headed prostitutes'. However, the records do not mention shaving the women's heads, so presumably Rawcliffe is making the assumption this would have happened, because the corporations wanted to mimic prostitutes' punishments in London. See Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies,* p. 108.

[488] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 19.

[489] *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX: The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort, K.G., The Earl of Donoughmore, and others*, p. 436.

[490] Ibid.

The leet courts in Great Yarmouth were also concerned about immoral sexual activity in the town. Prostitutes were supposed to confine themselves outside the town walls to the Denes, the northern part of which provided easy access to *Gropecunt Lane*. If prostitutes did not stay here, they could face both fines and banishment. It is clear that this did happen, as Rawcliffe's research into leet jurisdiction demonstrates. Alice Dymock was charged with petty larceny in the mid-1480s and charged with being a procuress in 1491. In 1492 she was fined when her lover attempted to kill her husband, for which romantic liaison she was further fined 6s 8d for adultery, alongside 6s for harbouring suspect persons. She was accused of being a common scold and again fined 16s 8d for promoting immorality, scolding and receiving a lover in 1496. By 1499 she had added keeping a brothel, selling ale without a licence, being a common whore, provoking quarrels, keeping a suspicious house, bawdry and cursing her neighbours to her long list of charges.[491] On 20 November, 1499, she was further fined three pence for suspicious activity with John Eribton.[492] Despite seven years of illicitly related presentments, it was not until 1500 that the authorities of Great Yarmouth finally banished her, on account of her being a leper. Alice was ordered to leave within three months, under the pain of £10, which Rawcliffe suggests was the largest fine imposed by the leet courts at that time.[493] Overall, Alice was fined for a period of almost twenty years before the authorities could rid the town of her. Perhaps Alice's endless fines were a way of the town taxing her activity, but once her constant quarrelling and unruly house had become too much of a scandal, the town was forced to find a way to expel her.

Courts evidentially had the power to banish prostitutes: in 1462, two 'ill-governed' women were told to depart the port under the pain of 20s within seven weeks.[494] However, authorities in Great Yarmouth seemed cautious to do so. As Catherine Casson argues, their hesitation may have been in part because of fears for the town's reputation. Although 'expulsion sent out a clear message to people beyond the town that the town did not tolerate persistent offenders… expelling a person also drew attention to the presence of the offence within the town', which may be why only 2.5%

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[491] Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), p. 252. She appears to have moved a number of times, see Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 68-9.

[492] *NRO*, Y/C4/202, roll 4.

[493] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 252. Rawcliffe states that this was the largest fine ever threatened by Yarmouth's leet court.

[494] Ibid., p. 285.

of cases found by Casson over 150 years involved expulsion.[495] Furthermore, revenue created by taxing illicit activity could be put back into improving the infrastructure of the town.

Prostitutes were further expected to wear striped hoods, to separate them from 'respectable' women, and prevent unassuming men from being deceived. Those found to be breaking this rule could face prosecution, as the aptly named Magna Haughe found out in 1384.[496] Alongside breaking the rule on striped hoods, Magna Haughe was fined 3d for receiving lepers, being a prostitute and a malefactor.[497] Sometimes, known prostitutes were expelled from the town and sent to live in the Denes. Rawcliffe notes the case of Licebet Janpetressen who was sent there in the late fourteenth century because of her perceived shameful behaviour.[498] Townspeople caught engaging in pre-marital sex with lepers or their husbands or wives could likewise face punishment, as shown by the indictment of John Cook for frequenting the wife of a leper in 1487, where punishment seems to have been used to deter others from engaging in sexual activity with lepers because of the fear of the spread of infection.[499]

Overall, although prostitutes were supposed to reside in the Denes, the authorities were clearly right to be concerned about prostitution taking place in the town, as it is clear that Alice and Licebet both solicited within the town walls.

Colchester: Evidence from The Red Paper Book

In Colchester, the authorities were not just concerned with prostitutes, but also with taverns and inns. The *Red Paper Book of Colchester* contains ordinances about hostellers in Colchester in the 1300s. The original book, written between 1310 and 1350, includes fourteenth century ordinances alongside some later entries. It was named the *Red Paper Book* because of the colour of its bindings, and was one of the most important record books used by the town's corporation. It was edited by Gurney Benham in the twentieth century, though he writes that (although there are some of his own notes) he has attempted to supply only necessary material so that others 'may give shape and meaning.'[500] From the reign of Edward IV, the book includes an ordinance that inns and taverns should be closed during service hours on the Sabbath and on feast

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[495] Casson, pp. 387-408 (p. 399).
[496] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies,* p. 112.
[497] *NRO*, Y/C4/ 96, roll 10.
[498] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies,* p. 112.
[499] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 286.
[500] *The Red Paper Book of Colchester,* preface.

days, to stop sexual misconduct and excessive drinking occurring on days of religious significance.[501] The authorities were clearly concerned about the link between alcohol and sex. The book includes a trade ordinance from 1483 which says that if any innkeeper 'kepe any bawdry within hym his fine is at every time vjs viijd, and if he will not be ware by ij warnyngs he to be judged un to the pilorie and after to forswere the town.' Brewers found to be continuously breaking the rules would be sent to the 'cokyngstole', and taverners had fines ranging from 12d to 3s 4d, but could also have their taverns 'sealed in'.[502] These ordinances may have had limited effect in the town, however, and in 1549 new ordinances stated that no tavern keeper should keep an 'unlawfull assembly of evyll disposed persons in their housys after a reasonable houre of the nyghte, thatys not after viij of the clock… nor suffre any [maidens] […] in their housys yn the Sondays' at any time of day during services upon pain of a 2s fine.[503]

Colchester: Evidence from the court rolls

Further ordinances and pleas are recorded in the Colchester court rolls, which survive in three volumes from the fourteenth century and were edited and transcribed by Isaac Herbert Jeayes between the 1920s and 1940s. Only nine court rolls have survived for the period between 1310 and 1352, and these are fragmentary. A second volume covers the years 1353 to 1367, which includes the tax rolls of only six years, one of which is fragmentary, and a further eight of which have been lost. Finally, the third volume, transcribed in 1941, covers the period from 1372 to 1379, although three court rolls for the period have been lost.[504] The rolls rarely state the punishments meted out to guilty perpetrators, although they do shed light on town authorities' concerns about the market place.

The case of Agnes de Ardleye in 1311 demonstrates concerns of the authorities about taverns and alewives in medieval market towns. The plea reports: 'Agnes de Ardleye charged by the bailiffs and commonalty that she is in the habit of selling at her taverns to foreigners wandering by night [after the curfew] and against the peace', and that the noise created through drunkenness was scaring the neighbours. Agnes denied

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[501] Ibid., p. 140.

[502] Ibid., p. 18-9.

[503] Ibid., p. 23.

[504] From around the 1380s, Colchester saw a levelling off and then steady decline in court business. As a result of this and various changes to court rolls from the mid fifteenth century (predominately in an effort to save money), the records after 1380 are much less complete, and therefore a less valuable source. Although later *Colchester Borough Records* are available in the Essex Record Office, they have not been transcribed or edited. Therefore, I have decided to focus on the court rolls from before 1380.

the charges, but on later enquiry was found guilty and charged to go 'for judgement on the following Monday at the Lawhundred'.[505] Her case was heard on 4 October 1311, where she 'put herself in mercy' and seems to have been excused.[506] Davis argues 'the wording and barely concealed vitriol of these ordinances parallels the literary portrayals of alewives that were common by the fifteenth century' as questionable women.[507] Although her tavern is not named, by 1400 there were somewhere between fifteen and twenty taverns in Colchester.[508] Of the nine or so taverns that survived into the late fourteenth century, all but one was situated on the High Street, so it seems likely that Agnes' tavern would have been there, too.[509]

The court was clearly concerned about 'night wanderers', even though many accused of 'evil doing' by the bailiffs were later found not guilty. It is likely that the authorities' concerns over criminality, drunkenness and prostitution in the marketplace led them to overzealous enquiries, but innocent people could bring a suit for defamation, as accusations could damage one's reputation.[510] Concerns about the moral and physical health of the market place may also have encouraged action against John Knyght and his wife Rose in 1366. They were accused of being lepers who roamed freely in the market place kissing children, again because lepers were believed to be more lustful than others and they were spreading the disease, and so were ordered to be removed. It is unclear whether this meant to remove them from just the marketplace or banish them from the town entirely, although prostitutes do not in general seem to have been banished.[511] Some women accused of being scolds were also believed to be linked to prostitution, and in 1376 Sara Malyn was fined for 'being a scold and receiving harlots'. Unfortunately how much she was fined is not recorded.[512]

The rolls also provide evidence for where prostitution was taking place in the town. In 1367, Eleanor Prestis was also accused of being a 'common harlot' and although there is no record of her punishment, the accusation stated that she lived in

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[505] *CRC: Vol I*, p. 45. 'Lawhundreds' in Colchester ran thrice yearly and were enlarged sessions of the hundred courts. Principal landowners were required to attend, and were concerned with ensuring the King's peace, public morality, commercial and agrarian offences.
[506] *CRC: Vol I*, p. 46.
[507] Davis, p. 247.
[508] Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525*, p. 131.
[509] Cooper, p. 44.
[510] *CRC: Vol I*, p. 65.
[511] *CRC, Vol II: 1353-1367*, trans. by I. H. Jeayes (Colchester: Colchester Town Council, 1938), p. 185.
[512] *CRC, Vol III: 1372-1379*, ed. by I. H. Jeayes (Colchester: Colchester Town Council, 1941), p. 104. Twelve women were also accused of public brawling, which may indicate prostitutes and pimps. See *CRC: Vol I*, p. 146.

Berislane located in the south of the town.[513] It is of note that this is the second town discussed in this thesis in which prostitutes were associated with *Ber Lane*, the other being *Ber Street* in Norwich, which likewise was located in the south of the town with direct access to a town gate. In 1375, this area in Colchester was again associated with prostitution, when Thomas Jerveys was accused of having two harlots in his house contrary to custom, one of whom, Katharine Kytlyng, lived 'at Southscherde outside the place of the commonalty'.[514] Whatever punishment Katherine was given does not seem to have deterred her, as she appeared before the court again in 1379, accompanied by another suspected prostitute, Agnes Terry. They were accused of being 'common harlots, outside "le Berislane" against the custom of the town'.[515] This may also be why Thomas Polsted was accused of receiving 'common harlots within the walls of Colchester, contrary to the regulations and use of the town', in 1354.[516]

Despite enquiries and sanctions, in Colchester the town authorities do not seem to have been right in assuming that illicit sex was focused around the market. Instead, *Bereslane* was more probably the designated area for prostitution. The court rolls note that there was a place specifically allocated for harlots in 1379, as Alice Clovechin, a common harlot, was 'living outside the place of old appointed for such' and was fined 2s. The area certainly attracted criminal activity. Prior to 1352, John Sale was accused of breaking the window and trespass of Margery atte Nasshe's house in *Bereslane*, and was fined 12d. Margery was not named as a prostitute, although her residence in *Bereslane* tends to validate the idea. If so, John may have been an unsatisfied customer or her pimp.[517] Either way, it seems likely that the place 'appointed for such' refers to *Bereslane* when we consider the accusations against Eleanor, Katherine and Agnes. This shows that the town authorities allowed prostitutes to solicit within the town walls, but away from the market.[518] As can be seen from Cooper's maps above, *Bereslane* (later to become *Vineyard Street*, which is how it is named on the map) was located inside the town walls, to the south of the town, close to St Botolph's priory. It is remarkable that there seems to have been acceptance by the town's authorities of prostitution, as long as the women stayed within a dedicated area.

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[513] *CRC*: *Vol II*, p. 220.
[514] *CRC*: *Vol III*, p. 69.
[515] *CRC*: *Vol III*, p. 177.
[516] *CRC*: *Vol II*, p. 24. Throughout the 1350s, various residents with Dutch and Flemish surnames were accused of 'night walking' which may indicate prostitution. See *CRC*: *Vol II*, pp. 76-9 and pp. 148-151.
[517] *CRC: Vol I*, p. 46 and p. 98. Cases of trespass may indicate rape, as with the case of John Davy in 1346, who 'arrested' Joan Bacoun, imprisoned and stripped her. See *CRC*: *Vol I*, p. 213. Further cases of rape may also be reported in 1357 and 1367. See *CRC*: *Vol II*, p. 66 and pp.205-6.
[518] *CRC*: *Vol III*, p. 186.

Of course, some of the women accused of prostitution in the court rolls would not have been working as prostitutes. In 1374, Henry Fens and his wife were brought before the court accused with 'receiving married priests and harlots at night'.[519] As priests were not allowed to be married, this accusation may suggest a long term 'wife' or life partner, but it is unclear whether this partner is the same as the 'harlot' mentioned, or if the priest was both married and mixing with prostitutes. Overall, the evidence from Colchester in the late fourteenth century suggests that although illicit sex was taking place within the town walls, prostitution was actually happening in the southern end of the town, and not in the market place as the authorities feared. Although women clearly ventured out of this area to solicit, measures taken by the authorities in Colchester to remove prostitutes from the market place seem to have worked.

Overall, authorities in market towns felt the need to enforce strict regulations because of concerns over the links between foreigners, alcohol and illicit sex. In both Gloucester and Great Yarmouth, women accused of prostitution could be banished or publicly humiliated, and were expected to wear distinctive clothing. In Colchester, there were strict ordinances on inn-keeping, though prostitution seems to have been on *Bereslane*. As regulations in market towns were encouraged by foreign travellers, it may be worth questioning whether evidence supports the towns' concerns that foreigners were the main perpetrators of illicit sex.

What evidence is there that clerics engaged in illicit sex in market towns?

Although all five towns discussed were market towns, and the authorities were concerned about travellers and immigrant prostitutes, the evidence from these towns suggests that it was actually the town's residents, not visitors to the market, who were primarily the perpetrators of illicit sex. Furthermore, as monastic and clerical centres, evidence from these towns, points to clergymen, monks and priests being involved in illicit sex.

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[519] *CRC: Vol III,* p. 53.

Colchester: Accusations against the clerics

The *Red Paper Book of Colchester* noted litigation against Colchester abbey; in 1286 the Abbot of St John's was accused of placing a cucking stall in Grystede despite having no right to do so, and further litigation is noted in the 1430s and 1490s, although no cases of illicit sex or adultery appear. However, in his research on regulating sex in England, Martin Ingram looked at *The Red Parchment Book* and discovered many cases of sexual transgressions between the 1470s and 1510s, some of which named members of the clergy. The book reported the prosecution of a priest in 1481, for adultery with a woman named Alice Watefalle. The priest in question was named as being the rector of St Nicholas', which was located on the High Street. In 1482 too, a cleric was prosecuted for adultery with a servant named Joan.[520]

Gloucester: St Bartholomew's Hospital

Members of the church in Gloucester were also accused of having sexual relationships. The *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* records that in the late fourteenth century, the priors of St Bartholomew's hospital were having illicit sexual affairs with poor women. St Bartholomew's was founded in 1189 and acquired a chapel in 1232. It was reasonably large, having around a dozen clergy, lay brothers and sisters, and ninety or so inmates in 1333.[521] It lay on Westgate Street to the far east of the town, away from the town centre, was surrounded by the Severn, and was accessible via Westgate Bridge. In their work on hospitals, Orme and Webster conclude that hospitals tended to be away from the centre of the town or in the suburbs. They further note that traffic played a part in this location, and argue that hospitals tended to pop up along roads and approaches to towns, which would be accurate for St Bartholomew's.[522] A number of tenements sat on the opposite side of the street, some of which were rented to townspeople by Llanthony Priory, and the Archdeacon's meadow lay at the back of the hospital. A great house of the poor was supposedly located somewhere in the west part of the site, which would have been the part nearest to Westgate Bridge and the route into town.

St Bartholomew's suffered maladministration under Nicolas de Hardwick and Walter Gibes in the fourteenth century. A commission held in 1344 found it had 'greatly decayed' because Hardwick had 'so burdened the hospital that its resources no longer

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[520] Ingram, p. 254.
[521] Orme and Webster, p. 36.
[522] Ibid., p. 41-3. Rawcliffe too makes this connection, see Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies,* p. 318.

sufficed for the maintenance of services.' In 1356, Hardwick resigned and Edward III appointed five commissioners to affect a thorough reform, although this was apparently ineffective as a later report found that the poor were being charged for admittance.[523] The inspection also found that sums of money, jewels, corn, beds, and other utensils intended for the poor had been detained by the prior.[524] Reports had initially reached the king of maladministration in 1381, when Gibes (the prior) was accused of 'dissolute living'.[525] Between 1380 and 1382, three enquiries were made of the hospital, and found that the Gibes had further bequeathed precious items to men of Gloucester, taken bed-money from the poor, and that 'when one of the saide poor dies they appropriate his goods and garments', which they then sold to people of the town. The report further stated that Gibes had built a door in the poor house, 'through which they carry hay and drive pigs and other animals, instead of through their own road on the east side of the hospital.' Finally, Gibes was accused of appropriating lands left to the poor by the men of Gloucester and having 'unroofed a great house which the said poor had on the west of the hospital and taken the timber and tiles to their own use, and have made a door between their houses and enter day and night and sleep with the women.'[526] If the prior was sneaking in women, it would have made sense to sneak them in via the poor house, as this was nearest to the route into town. Of course, accusing the prior of sleeping with women may purely have been to further the case against him, and it is not repeated elsewhere in the records, but this does not necessarily make the accusation false. Sex was reported in other hospitals in the record: in c.1500 for example, an unnamed almshouse in Dartmouth appeared twice in the mayor's court roll, because it was alleged that 'Margaret Stidbery keeps an *adulterium* or bawdry… in le Almyshows' for which she was fined.[527]

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[523] William Page, 'St Bartholomew's Hospital, Gloucester' in *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 2* (1907) 119-122 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol2/pp119-122#fnn68> [accessed 11 July 2019]. For further problems at the hospital, including stealing bread from the poor, see *The Calendar of the Records of the Corporation of Gloucester*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1893), pp. 60-62, p. 392, p. 411 and p. 460, *Cal IM, Vol IV, 1377-1388* (London: Her Majesties Stationary Office, 1957), p. 45, *Cal PR*, Henry *VI, A.D. 1422- 1429* (Norwich: Norfolk Chronicle Company, 1901), p. 105.

[524] *Cal PR, Edward III, Vol XI, A.D. 1358-1361* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1911), p. 75

[525] *VCH, Herefordshire*, I, p. 120. It is possible that these charges were exaggerated, and Page notes that Gibes was never actually deposed. Regardless, the hospital does seem to have suffered from some maladministration and poverty, and as such was exempt from taxation in 1401.

[526] *Cal PR, Richard II, A.D. 1377-1381* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1895), pp. 573-77. For the enquiry made in 1382, see *Cal PR; Richard II, A.D. 1381-1385* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1897), p. 137.

[527]Orme and Webster, p. 225.

St Bartholomew's was not an uncommon case; Orme and Webster note that after the Black Death, many hospitals in England suffered as a result of reduced incomes, fewer people seeking hospital services, reported 'absent priests' and partially damaged buildings. This led to a call for reformation of the hospitals by the House of Commons in 1414, although these reforms cannot have been very successful; as early as 1415 further reforms were called for, and these attempts continued into the 1460s. [528] Despite the reforms, sometimes those who died within a hospital may have their goods appropriated, and it was not uncommon for hospitals to charge the sick for a bed. This was partly because reduced income after the Black Death meant that hospitals that survived focused their finances on the upkeep of the clergy and chapel services, at the expense of the sick and poor. As for St Bartholomew's, it seems that the financial state of the hospital did not improve with the reforms, as forty days indulgence was still being offered to those who donated charity to the hospital during Reginald Bouler's time as bishop in 1451, some seventy years later.[529] Topographically, if clerical sex was taking place in St Bartholomew's, this was away from both *Love Lane* and the urban centre, on the outskirts of town, but was easily accessible via the town's main road Westgate Street.

Gloucester: Other accusations

Karras argues that the authorities in Gloucester may have seen prostitution as 'the better alternative', to reduce prosecutions of the clergy, for adultery and fornication with the daughters and wives of burghers of the town.[530] However, this is not obvious from the corporation's actions in the early sixteenth century. Alongside punishing the women and those helping them, the town's authorities punished clerics found to be having illicit relationships. They ordained that 'if any such priests or religious daily haunt prostitutes within any ward of the town, or walk by night suspiciously, or take with unlawful demeaning with whores, strumpets, or with men's wives' that they would be 'brought to the which for theym appointed, ther to remayne by the discretion of the Justices of the Peace.' Further, if they were seen to be so abominable that they would not 'amend' their actions, they were to be dealt with by the Justices of the Peace. If

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[528] Ibid., p. 119, p. 135 and p. 183. The House of Commons stated that hospitals should serve the blind, 'impotent men and women, lazars, men and women out of their wits and minds, and poor women with child.' See also Sheila Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: Gift-giving and the Spiritual Economy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 112. Both Sweetinburgh and Orme and Webster discuss accusations against St Bartholomew's, but neither references the accusation about women.

[529] *The Register of Reginaldi Boulers, Bishop of Hereford, 1451-1453*, ed. by A. T. Bannister (Hereford: Wilson and Phillips, 1917), p. 4.

[530] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 77.

priests were found to be acting in this way, or a complaint had been made about them in regards to illicit sex, then the burgesses, alongside the wardens or the priests' master, were instructed to discharge the guilty priest, upon the pain of a three shilling four pence fine. Again, the ordinance said that this would 'be levyed by the stewards to the reparacion of the town's walls.'[531] Although it could be argued that these ordinances showed a lively attempt on the part of the authorities to eradicate sexual misconduct, it is unclear whether these punishments were ever carried out long term. One may be more convinced by the argument that rather than a 'lively moral attempt' against illicit sex, the corporation really used these cases to fund their own infrastructural needs.

Bury St Edmunds: Investigations by William Hoo

In both the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, investigations took place against the monks of Bury St Edmunds, because of their supposed immoral behaviour. In the thirteenth century, the monks were accused of sleeping with prostitutes. Samson, who became abbot in 1182, had apparently already tried to reform the monks. The *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, written by the monk Jocelin of Brakelond and covering the years 1173-1202, says that Samson stopped immoderate feastings in the prior's lodgings and demolished the sacrist building in the cemetery, because it had become the location of drinking parties and other scandalous activities. Jocelin recalls:

> The abbot even ordered the sacrist's house in the cemetery to be completely demolished, as if it were not fit to stand upon the earth, on account of the frequent drinking sessions and other unmentionable activities of which he had become painfully aware as subsacrist. Within a year he had it all razed to the ground: where a fine building had stood we saw beans pushing up their stems, and where wine barrels had been stored there grew a bed of nettles.[532]

The sacristy was located to the east of the churchyard, near the bridge crossing the River Linnet and River Lark, conveniently the crossing points to the abbey from the vineyard, which could be accessed by townsfolk from the East Gate.

In the thirteenth century, the letterbook of William Hoo shows that some accusations of illicit sex were again made against the monks, though as has been discussed in previous chapters, ecclesiastical sex may not have been perceived as badly as the records suggest. William of Hoo was the sacrist of Bury St Edmunds between

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[531] *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX: The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort, K.G., The Earl of Donoughmore, and others*, p. 437.

[532] *Jocelin of Brakelond, Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, trans. by Diana Greenway & Jane Sayers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 28-9, and A. Gransden, *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, 1182-1256* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 198.

1280 and 1294. The letterbook contains over two hundred entries, although the first fifty-six use initials rather than full place names.

The book reflects the differing roles William played in Bury's ecclesiastical society, of which his role as moral enforcer is particularly revealing. William was required to investigate morality in the town, and to deal with possible illicit sex and adultery. Sometime after 1279, William was sent a mandate by the abbot of St Edmunds, John de Norwold, requesting that he inquire and punish the full chapter of Bury because he believed they were associated with prostitutes and had concubines. The abbot had received reports that women who were concubines and prostitutes were hiding within the abbot's jurisdiction, despite his previous mandates forbidding them, and requested that the women (alongside those believed to be hiding them) were punished with excommunication.[533] From 1044 to 1539, the abbot of St Edmundsbury had extensive jurisdiction, not just over the town but also over 'eight and a half hundreds' in an expansive area covering west Suffolk. Known as the 'Liberty of St Edmund', the area was administered by a Steward under the supervision of the abbot. Because of this, it is impossible to say exactly where the concubines William was searching for were. However, as he was initially asked to inquire as to the activities of the chapter, it is likely that these women were within the town walls.

William was further expected to punish laypeople behaving immorally who came within his jurisdiction. In 1289, the Archdeacon of Ely also requested that William take action in matters of adultery. He asked that William publish the excommunication of two adulterers, John of the Mote, who was a painter, and Beatrice of Ely, who was the wife of Peter of Soham. The Archdeacon stated that they were hiding in Bury (unfortunately he does not record where, but it would certainly have been within the town walls), having moved around the country, and wanted them publicly denounced, to prevent them from being able to live as a couple in a different town, where the authorities may not have been aware that she already had a husband.[534]

Alongside punishing those found guilty of adultery, William attempted to secure the marriage of couples who were openly living together (and who possibly already believed themselves married). Although clandestine marriages were illegal, canonists and theologians alike encouraged secretly married couples to celebrate their love

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[533] *The Letterbook of William of Hoo, Sacrist in Bury St Edmunds 1280-1294*, pp. 41-2. John de Norwold served as abbot from 1279 to 1302.
[534] *The Letterbook of William of Hoo, Sacrist in Bury St Edmunds 1280-1294*, pp. 52-3.

publicly, and some couples were encouraged to 'furnish' certificates, which could act as a safeguard against legal interest.[535] In entries dated between 1280 and 1294, William responded to six inquiries in an attempt to publicise and legalise marriage, even against some apparent 'doubts' about one of the couples freedom to do so.[536]

Bury: Further accusations against the monks

In the fourteenth century, the monks of Bury St Edmunds were again accused of a number of sexual crimes. One example of this can be seen in *The Pinchbeck Register*, compiled by Walter Pynchebeck, a monk from Bury St Edmunds, in the fourteenth century. The register mainly discusses rents and the like due to the abbey, in addition to transgressions against the abbey. The register was edited into two volumes by Francis Hervey in the 1920s, and covers the fourteenth century. In a report on the 1327 uprising against the abbey, the register notes that among the attackers was a woman named Alicia de Diste, the known concubine of a chaplain named William de Herlyng.[537] Of course, as a cleric, chaplains were not allowed to have girlfriends or wives, yet their relationship was evidently not secret. The register notes that she, alongside others, committed felonies and was involved in setting fires against the abbey: 'item dicunt quod Alicia de Diste concubina Willelmi de Herlyng Capellani, Margeria filia Roberti Kembold fuerunt Adiutruies ad dictas combustiones et felonias perpetrandas et faciendas.'[538]

In 1345, the monks were further accused of living away from the abbey, wearing lay clothing and having 'many illegitimate children', although this may have been exaggerated by Bishop Bateman to secure a visitation of Bury.[539] However, accusations against the monks were longstanding, shown by the protests against the abbey in 1327, when there was great concern over the moral condition of St Edmundsbury, and even the Franciscan friars had joined protests against the abbey monks.[540] Rioters against the abbey were certainly serious, reportedly setting up a block and axe in Bury market

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[535] Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 442.

[536] *The Letterbook of William of Hoo, Sacrist in Bury St Edmunds 1280-1294*, pp. 65-66.

[537] Walter Pynchebeck, *The Pinchbeck Register, relating to The Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, Vol I*, ed. by Lord Francis Hervey (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 105.

[538] Ibid.

[539] *VCH, Suffolk*, II, p. 71.

[540] *VCH, Suffolk*, II, p. 125. For longstanding complaints, see *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakeland, monk of St Edmundsbury*, ed. by L. C. Jane (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), p.55, in which the abbot was accused of 'burdening the cellarer with guests' in the twelfth century. Disputes between the bishop and monks were also reported in 1346. See Richard Yates, *An Illustration of the monastic History and Antiquities of the town and abbey of St Edmundsbury* (London: William Miller, 1805), pp. 108-11.

place, alongside burning down the abbey gates, imprisoning the prior and sub prior and plundering.[541] Overall, it seems clear that there was genuine resentment in the town towards the abbey, and accusations about the monks being immoral were used to justify condemnation.

In 1335, the monks elected William Bernham as sub-prior, which was undoubtedly a bad decision as discipline became ever more lax. Commissioners such as Bateman were concerned about the morality of St Edmundsbury as a whole, but also about Bernham's personal conduct. A special commission was therefore arranged in 1345, with the sole purpose of 'inquiring into the scandalous immorality' of which some of the monks were supposedly guilty. [542] The *Cronica Buriensis*, a history of St Edmundsbury abbey, was written by various authors (although Arnold attributes the work solely to a monk of St Benet Hulme), and covers the period from 1020 to 1346.[543] The special commissioners report in July 1345 accused the monks of a number of charges, and found, 'in adulterinis, fornicariis, ac incestuosis amplexibus, etiam publice, detinent mulieres, ex quibus habere feruntur notorie testes gradients plurimos super terram… nocte dieque maleficorum consortiis publicorum, mulierum raptibus, deflorationibus virginum, viarum insidiis […] aliisque nefandis criminibus se indifferenter exponent', amongst other crimes such as usury and simony.[544] The chronicler was somewhat dubious as to the legitimacy of these accusations, saying that the mandate was full of 'false and libellous charges', although Arnold disagrees. He argued that the document came from 'two ecclesiastics of repute and good standing in the church', so was unlikely to be wrong. Further, he believed the chronicler was unwillingly to entirely dispute the claims, as 'he does not say that the whole string of charges against the Bury monks and their abbot was false, but only that the report contained "multa falsa et enormia".'[545] As claims against the monks were longstanding, it seems likely that at least some of these accusations held merit. Overall, amongst other vices, the monks were accused of adultery, fornication, incest, rape, simony, usury,

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[541] *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, ed. by T. Arnold, 3 vols (1890-96), vol II (1896) (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1896), pp. 330-39.

[542] In his introduction, Arnold states that the commissioners decided to discuss the abbot's personal conduct with him in private, and therefore it is not in the final report. See *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, ed. by T. Arnold, 3 vols (1890-96), vol III (1896) (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1896), p. x.

[543] Arnold named the work the *Cronica Buriensis* and attributed it solely to one monk, although Antonia Gransden questions this. See Antonia Gransden, *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1992), p. 239. Gransden states that the only remaining copy of the manuscript which still exists is dated c.1400 and is held by Cambridge University library, MS. 850, fols. 25v-48v, with the last eight leaves having been lost.

[544] *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, vol III, p. 66

[545] Ibid., vol III, p. x.

meeting criminally at night, deflowering virgin girls and sexual relations with women. The report further stated that although Bernham was aware of these crimes, he had allowed them to continue.[546] If the report is to be believed, the monks lived away from the abbey in the surrounding villages, wore lay clothing, were engaged in fights, raped women and had many illegitimate children. These accusations mirror those against monks in other towns, and it seems highly likely that some of the monks had relationships and even families in the town.

Arnold never discussed the sexual nature of the crimes listed, instead only writing that they were accused of 'abductions, fighting, riots and other unlawful practices'.[547] Again, this is typical of writers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who refused to highlight or even note sexual acts in medieval records, meaning that manuscripts with sexual references may not have been completely edited. During the uprising of 1381, the monks of Bury were again accused of a number of charges, including consorting with criminals, rape, adultery, robbery, and perjury.[548]

Shrewsbury: Access to Grope Lane

In Shrewsbury too, accusations against monks occurred during the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The friars of St Austin's were accused in the early fifteenth century of interacting with prostitutes on *Grope Lane*. The friary was near the river Severn and the town wall, in the northern end of the town, less than a ten-minutes' walk away from the street. Although writing much later in the 1700s, Phillips argued that the friars took children away from their parents, sometimes with violence, until Henry IV reiterated an older statute forbidding this, and that their other abuse was 'their scandalous lewdness and venery, insomuch, that a lane in this town from their nocturnal pranks is to this day called Grope Lane.'[549] Despite Phillips' accusations, it seems unlikely that *Grope Lane* got its name because of the friars, although it is interesting that people in the town believed that the friars were involved in scandalous goings on there.[550] Blakeway noted that *Grope Lane* was close to the 'abbot and convent of Lilleshull', which may actually refer to the Church of St Alkmund, which was dissolved to provide funding for the abbey (meaning that the two were often confused). This

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[546] Ibid., vol III, pp. 65-6.
[547] Ibid., vol III, p. xii.
[548] *VCH*, *Suffolk*, I: Part II, p. 653.
[549] Phillips, p. 108.
[550] Phillips is certainly biased against the friaries as a whole, and calls them 'odious to mankind', see p. 108. It is likely therefore that he exaggerated accusations against the Austin Friars in Shrewsbury.

would make sense, as St Alkmund's stood opposite the northern end of *Grope Lane*, and would therefore have been easily accessible.[551]

In both Shrewsbury and Bury, it is clear that the authorities (alongside laypeople), suspected the monks of both St Edmundsbury and Shrewsbury Abbey of engaging in sexual relationships. Topographically, both abbeys would have been easily accessible to women in the towns (although entry was dependant on their gate-keepers), and the monks were also accused of having families elsewhere.

Great Yarmouth: Rose tinted glasses?

Great Yarmouth had a priory named after the patron saint of prostitutes, St Nicholas. It is interesting that medieval thinkers associated Saint Nicholas with prostitutes, because of the story in which he gave three young poor maidens bags of money in the middle of the night, so that they would not be forced into prostitution because of their financial status, and could instead use the money as dowry to procure good marriages. This legend was hugely popular in the fifteenth century, and was portrayed in paintings such as 'The Dowry for the Three Virgins' by Gentile da Fabriano, c. 1425.[552] The association with prostitution was simply made because St Nicholas had given money to poor maidens, and reflected the belief in Saint Nicholas as an almsgiver. Furthermore, it is characteristic of the role he has played as the modern 'Santa Claus' or the colloquial 'St Nick': delivering presents or money late at night on Christmas Eve. In this particular story, his kindness in anonymously giving the women alms stops their father from being forced to sell them into prostitution. Although a legend, it is perhaps demonstrative of real fears of poor families (in particular those with many daughters) across medieval Europe.

In stark contrast to Shrewsbury and Bury, Great Yarmouth's priory was seemingly well run.[553] Writing in the mid sixteenth century, the town clerk, Henry Manship, said 'there is one thing in this town most worthy of commendation: there hath

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[551] Blakeway, 'The Topographical History of Shrewsbury', pp. 311-350 (pp. 323).

[552] For more on this, and other popular imagery of St Nicholas and the virgin daughters, see A. Sand, *Vision, Devotion and Self Representation in Late Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially p. 122-124. The National Gallery in London, UK, also has a painting depicting this legend: *The Charity of St Nicholas of Bari*, by Girolamo Macchietti, c. 1555-60. These depictions encouraged charitable giving towards poor maidens and prostitutes. Heal states that in medieval England, 'charity' was 'primarily directed towards the articulation of Christian community.' See Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.15.

[553] *Visitations in Norwich, A.D. 1492- 1532*, ed. by A. Jessopp (London: The Camden Society, 1888), p. 72.

not dwelled in it any ecclesiastical person which of fleshly crime hath been at any time, as our records saith positively, detected.'[554] Whilst Manship may have looked upon his beloved Yarmouth through rose-tinted glasses, his comments encourage the idea that sexual or 'fleshly' crimes were at least seen to be commonplace amongst members of the church, and therefore the fact that this had not been detected in Great Yarmouth was worthy of note. Although the priory itself was not suspect, it was positioned near Fullers Hill in the North of the town, near *Grope Lane*, and Manship states that the south side was used as a house of correction '[for the] instruction of youth in good doctrine and manners'.[555]

Regardless of Great Yarmouth's priory, inquisitions and ordinances from Colchester, Bury, Shrewsbury and Gloucester suggests that clerics engaged in sex in market towns, as they did in both university and cathedral towns.

Conclusions

As medieval market towns centred so much on the marketplace, it is not surprising that these towns' authorities were concerned that tradesmen and travellers to the markets would be the predominant clients of prostitution. This belief led to various statutes against alehouses and taverns, preventing them from selling beer past the curfew and stopping them from allowing suspicious people in their lodgings, in an attempt to prevent these houses from becoming brothels. Market goers were seen by the authorities as having particular vices, and regulation was therefore seen as a necessity to ensure the morality of the town.

In all five towns, specific areas were consistently seen as the location of sexual liaisons; in Colchester, women seem to have solicited around *Bereslane* and the South Gate. Shrewsbury had a *Grope Lane* which may have been visited by the Austin friars, although there has been much historical debate about the street name. When compared to other towns, it seems likely that this street became known for the sexual relationships that took place there and not because of its size as many twentieth-century historians have suggested. Of course, these twentieth-century historians reflect a consistent refusal

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[554] Manship, p. 5.
[555] Ibid., p. 43.

to note sexual references in medieval texts, presumably because of their own embarrassment, and this is a common occurrence of writers of the time. In Great Yarmouth, *Gropecunte Lane* was easily accessible by travellers and from the Denes, to where prostitutes and lepers alike were banished. Alternatively, individuals looking for illicit encounters could frequent brothels set up to accommodate travellers through Great Yarmouth's port. Like other sexualised streets, *Love Lane* in Gloucester was located next to the busy market area, with easy access to churches, town gates and the towns' inns, and mimicked other streets named after the occupations which took place there. Finally, in Bury, sexual liaisons may have taken place in the area immediately around the abbey, chapterhouse and the sacrist building, as accusations of illicit sexual activity were directed at the monks.

In Bury, the sacrist was expected to punish adulterers within his jurisdiction, and the most common punishment from him was excommunication. In Colchester, members of the town found to be harbouring prostitutes could face a fine, although repeated offences could also lead to the pillory and banishment or the cucking stool. Enquiries in the 1300s in Colchester discussed cases of violence, rape, sex amongst servants, prostitution, and of priests having concubines, though rarely stated the punishments given to those found guilty. Where punishments were noted, the most common punishment was a fine. In Shrewsbury too, authorities subjected those found guilty to the cucking stool or tumbrel, although in extreme cases criminals could be hanged or imprisoned, whilst ecclesiastical authorities in Shrewsbury may have also punished by 'fustigations' or beatings.[556] In Gloucester, humiliation was favoured alongside levying fines which were used to repair the town walls. Gloucester not only banished prostitutes, but also fined those found helping them and used public humiliation to deter others from leading sinful lives.[557] Authorities were hesitant to draw attention to their town's sexual crimes, preferring to fine rather than banish as this could also be beneficial to the town's taxation. In Great Yarmouth too, prostitutes could be banished, though offenders of sexual crimes were more likely to be fined.

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[556] See *Collections for a History of Staffordshire, Vol I*, ed. by William Salt Archaeological Society (Birmingham: Houghton & Hammond, 1880), p. 272 for an example of this, in which Bishop Norbury wrote a writ to the Archdeacon of Stafford requesting he 'fustigate' one person. Fustigation was the act of being beaten with a club and was uncommon prior to the seventeenth century.

[557] However, punishments in Gloucester for other crimes were much harsher. In 1394 for example, a woman was burnt to death for killing her husband. See *Cal IM*: *Vol VI, 1392-1399* (London: Her Majesty's Record Office, 1963), p. 33.

As in other medieval towns, in market towns illicit sex was a sporadic affair, but one that took place within the town walls, and whilst authorities attempted to regulate the problem, punishments were rarely harsh for a first offence. Conclusions drawn in this chapter do question the concerns of the towns' authorities, however. Firstly, although the town authorities in Colchester fined those found soliciting, and were evidently concerned about the morality of the town, prostitution appears to have been allowed in *Bereslane*, presumably to take it away from the marketplace. Additionally, the authorities of market towns seem to have believed that travellers and strangers were the root of illicit sex, although records reveal a different picture. Instead, accusations against the monks in Bury and clergy in Gloucester, alongside perpetrators brought before the court at Colchester, and prostitutes banished in Great Yarmouth, were all permanent residents of the towns. Perhaps this is a classic case of the 'other,' whereby the towns' authorities (and residents) preferred to believe that those associated with immoral activities were not 'true' citizens of the town, but instead immoral aliens and travellers, who therefore were not an accurate representation of the townsfolk. With the exception of alien Dutch prostitutes in Colchester and Licebet in Great Yarmouth, this rose-tinted view of the residents is in stark contrast to the evidence.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this thesis has investigated whether illicit sexual activity took place in specific areas within towns. In doing so, this thesis has shed light on where prostitutes solicited within towns, why they dwelled in these areas, what this can tell us about their clientele, and what impact regulation had upon prostitution and illicit sex. We may conclude that prostitution was for the pleasure of townsfolk, scholars, clergymen, and friars, and that authorities allowed prostitution to prevent scandal to the town, as long as this did not disrupt the town's moral health. Furthermore, although town councils may have condemned illicit sex, in actuality these perceived vices were often tolerated, and illegitimate children could request dispensation to prevent parental illicit relationships getting in the way of their careers.

Clientele

In all cases studied in this thesis, the clients of prostitutes, and those accused of engaging in illicit sex, were not predominately foreigners or travellers to the town, as town authorities feared. In market towns authorities were concerned that strangers in the town inns might have engaged with prostitutes. However, as the evidence from the towns studied in this thesis shows, the most common clientele of prostitutes were the towns' clergy and students, or men living within the town. In Bury, for example, accusations suggested that it was the town's monks who were the main clients of prostitutes. This reflects research in other English towns such as Winchester, in which clergymen made up the majority of prostitute's clientele.[558]

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[558] Keene, pp. 390-391 and Kettle, p. 28.

Inquisition and Punishment

Prostitution on the continent was sometimes tolerated because of its perceived benefit to society. However, councils in England continued to condemn it, and prostitutes could be punished alongside adulterers, or sexually active members of the clergy. Despite this, the term 'common prostitute' was not first used in English law until the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which deemed prostitutes as 'idle and disorderly' persons who could be punished with up to one month's commitment 'to the house of correction'.[559] Until the nineteenth century then, there was no nationally defined punishment for prostitution, or nationally defined terminology, meaning that punishment for prostitutes and incontinent women (and others engaging in perceived immoral sexual behaviour), fell to local and ecclesiastical councils. Inquisition by local councils in towns became more common during times of plague, and after the 1470s, and magistrates made greater attempts to eliminate prostitutes from towns during these times, with varying degrees of effectiveness and zeal.[560]

Because local councils were tasked with punishing illicit sex, inquisitions into illicit sexual behaviour varied depending upon who was in charge at the time. Of the towns examined in this thesis, inquisitions were seemingly most rigorous in Cambridge and Gloucester. In Cambridge, searches were even conducted outside the chancellor's jurisdiction, in Stourbridge, and penance and banishment were the favoured choice of punishment. In Oxford in the 1440s, the most common punishment used by Gascoigne was abjuration, although banishment too could be used in extreme cases. Likewise, in Great Yarmouth, prostitutes could be banished to the Denes, and were required to wear striped hoods to differentiate them from 'respectable' women. In Hereford, however, clerics found guilty of engaging in illicit sex could face imprisonment.

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[559] Oswald states that 'prostitution was not a crime under in English law, but it was treated as one by the proctors', p. 459, although this is not strictly true. See 'The Vagrancy Act, 1824', Section 3 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/5/83/section/3> [accessed 11 July 2019] for the laws on prostitution.

[560] Town authorities may have increased inquisition during times of plague because they feared retribution from God for not acting against sinful sexual practices. However, Rawcliffe argues that most town authorities did distinguish between the plague (which was a punishment from God), and sexually transmitted diseases, which were instead the fault of sexually loose women, and could be treated with various ointments and potions. See Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 110.

For all of the towns studied in this thesis, fines were used again and again by local authorities to punish prostitutes and offenders of illicit sexual activity. [561] These fines could be seen as a licensing fee of sorts, and in Gloucester, for example, the money was used to help the town's building projects. In his research on regulating sex, Ingram agrees with this conclusion, writing that 'fines were a disguised form of licensing, implying an underlying toleration. If they had indeed been treated as a fiscal device, they would surely have been much more regularly and consistently levied at set rates.'[562]

Topographically, these punishments were public affairs. Pillories, stocks and cucking stools were located in the market place, and therefore perpetrators of sexual sin were publicly judged by their neighbours. In addition to this, in Gloucester, Shrewsbury and Hereford, streets associated with punishments were located directly next to sexualised streets. This may well have been a deliberate attempt to act as a deterrent to guilty perpetrators, and seems to acknowledge the fact that illicit sex was taking place in these areas. Ingram suggests that public punishments were also prominent in Chichester and Leicester in the 1520s, and that the use of a 'white sheet', as seen in Cambridgeshire, was an extreme version of this, especially in a society 'in which dress was such an important marker of wealth and status, to be thus stripped bare must have been a deep humiliation.'[563] As deterrents were located near sexualised streets, we may question whether these streets were really 'accepted' by English medieval society. Authorities attempted to regulate and control illicit sex as best they could, in some cases by designating particular streets as places for sexual liaisons. In Colchester, for example, records in the late 1370s referred to 'a place of old appointed for such'.[564]

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[561] Court rolls too show that fines were used to punish offenders found to be harbouring prostitutes away from the towns in suburban manors. See *The Court Rolls of the Honor of Clitheroe in the County of Lancaster, Vol III*, trans. by W. Farrer (Edinburgh: The Ballatyne Press, 1913), pp. 18-19 and 309 and Carole Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), p.110 for a discussion on the Paston family in Norfolk.

[562] Ingram, p. 135.

[563] Ibid., p. 100. Ingram suggests that court records in the fourteenth century suggest that both male and female perpetrators of sexual sin were 'often ordered to be whipped', see p. 109. However, this punishment was not used in any of the towns discussed, and only in Shrewsbury, where perpetrators could be 'fustigated', was public beating a possible punishment.

[564] *CRC: Vol I (1310-1352)*, p. 46.

A Comparison of Sexualised Streets

Holt and Baker's research shed light onto the existence of *Grope Lanes* in London, Norwich, Bristol, York, Shrewsbury, Oxford, Newcastle, Worcester, Hereford, Wells, Reading, Banbury, Whitby and Orford.[565] Of the nine towns studied in this thesis, five had a *Grope Lane*, Norwich and Colchester both had a *Ber Street* located in the southern part of the town, and all but Bury St Edmunds had sexually named streets. I have collated the information from towns with a *Grope Lane* into a table (below). In Hereford, *Grope Lane* was located in the north-eastern part of the town, with direct access to the market, and was different to the other *Grope Lanes* studied, as the street itself was reasonably large, and housed the town's main prison.[566] Norwich had two sexually named streets, *Grope Lane* and *Whores Lane*. *Grope Lane*, known as *Turpis Vicus* (meaning 'Foul Street'), was centrally located and had easy access to the market. *Whores Lane*, in the northern part of the town, had easy access to the northern gate and *Coselayne*, one of the town's main thoroughfares.[567] In Great Yarmouth too, *Grope Lane* was located in the north-eastern part of the town, and had access to the northern gate and the Denes beyond, alongside being close to the town's main market.[568] *Grope Lane* in Oxford is the earliest recorded, and was centrally located off the high street, though was more like an alleyway than a street. It also lay directly opposite the university church of St Mary's. Unlike the other towns studied, the prevalence of the university encouraged a different clientele in Oxford, that of students, and three colleges were located around the street.[569] Finally, *Grope Lane* in Shrewsbury (the only street name to have survived), was also central and small, and was connected to the old market. Unlike the other towns studied, some of the town's wealthiest residents lived there.[570] As can be seen in the table, these streets were mostly small, centrally located, within the town walls, near to the market, and had access to town gates and churches. Finally, they appear to have been in use from the mid thirteenth to seventeenth

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[565] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', p. 202.

[566] See chapter 4 on Gloucester and Hereford, pp. 99-100; Lobel, *Historic Towns: Maps and Plans of Towns and Cities in the British Isles, with historic commentaries, from earliest times to 1800*, pp. 7-9; Baker, 'A Characterisation of the Historic Townscape of Central Herefordshire', 1-39 (p.12).

[567] See chapter 3 on Great Yarmouth and Norwich, pp. 90-7; Rutledge, 'Norwich before the Black Death' in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 157-189 (p. 182); Campbell, p. 25; Williamson, p. 84

[568] Ibid, p. 97-8.

[569] See chapter 1 on Oxford, pp. 27-34.

[570] See chapter 5 on Bury St Edmunds, Colchester and Shrewsbury, pp. 165-70.

centuries, and all were renamed by the 1840s, with the exception of Shrewsbury, though the ending *cunt* has been removed.

Table 3: Comparisons between *Gropecunt Lanes*

	Hereford	Norwich	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Yarmouth
Location in town	NE	C	SE	C	N
Central / close to High Street*	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Within town walls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Large street	Y	N	N	N	N
First date found in records	UNCLEAR	1313	1230	1324	1299
Last date found in records	1844***	1696	1605	n/a****	1514
Adjacent to market	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Close to castle	N	Y	N	N	N
Close to castle wall gate	Y	N	N	N	Y
Close to large church or cathedral	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Renamed**	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

* By central I mean close to a town's busy area

** Hereford's merged with *Gaol Street*, Norwich's took the name *Turpis Vicus* which later became *Opie Street*, Oxford's was renamed *Magpie Lane*, and Yarmouth's was renamed *Cross Row*

*** When the new gaol was built, the street was referred to as *Grope Lane*, *cunt* seems to have been dropped in early seventeenth century

**** The lane's name is still in use at the time of writing

Change over time: The impact of the Reformation and a rising population

The table above also indicates something else: a changing attitude towards these streets and deemed illicit sexual behaviour over time. With the exception only of Shrewsbury, all *Grope Lanes* were renamed from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Alongside renaming lewd streets, punishments for sexual deviance became more public affairs. Whilst fines had acted as the preferred method of punishment previously, by the early sixteenth century, town authorities began to introduce public punishments for perpetrators of sexual sin. The cases of Benet Gedwyis in 1562, and Agnes Black in 1593, were the result of years of increased interest into people's sexual activity.[571] This, as has been discussed in previous chapters, was shown by repeated attempts by town authorities to publicly punish. For example, in Gloucester from 1500, it was decided that prostitutes should be conveyed from ward to ward wearing a paper hood, and by the use of the 'white sheet' seen in Chichester in the 1520s.[572] Stricter regulations were also being imposed to prevent illicit sex, such as regulations imposed on inns in Colchester from 1549, and by more regular searches, such as those in Cambridge from the 1520s.[573]

This increased interest in people's sexual behaviour was fuelled by the Reformation. Reformation propaganda encouraged fears about corruption in the church, and perpetuated the idea that clergymen were at fault of sexual vices. This may be why nineteenth century historians, discussed in this thesis, (such as Henry Manship) felt the need to stress the moral purity of their towns ecclesiastics.[574]

In addition, the sixteenth century saw a population increase in England, which saw the population rise to higher than it had been prior to the Black Death.[575] With an increased population size, came an increase in 'vagabonds', or able-bodied but unemployed individuals. In 1530, parliament declared that 'vagabonds and beggars

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[571] Blomefield, p. 739 and Gray, pp. 134-5.
[572] Ingram, p. 136 and p. 100.
[573] *The Red Paper Book of Colchester*, p. 23, and see Table 1.
[574] Manship, p. 5.
[575] There is some debate among historians about the approximate numbers. See John Langdon and James Masschaele, 'Commercial Activity and Population Growth in Medieval England' *Past and Present*, 190 (2006) pp. 35- 81 (p. 77).

have a long time increased, and daily do increase, in great and excessive numbers.'[576] The sixteenth century chronicler William Harrison described vagabonds running up and down the land, seeking work and finding none, and wrote that they included 'rogues and strumpets'[577]. In his research, Fishman argues that these individuals became the scapegoat for all social problems. Indeed, they were believed to be the root of all thefts, robberies and evil acts, and therefore their increased presence amplified concern about illicit sexual behaviour.[578]

Overall, new Reformation propaganda about sexual deviance, alongside population (and vagabond) increase, economic change, and declining wages, may therefore have all attributed to changing attitudes towards sexualised street names.

Topography: Were there particular streets designated for 'illicit sex' in medieval English towns?

So, were there recognised street names that indicated the presence of sex workers or brothels in English towns prior to the Reformation? The evidence collated from the towns studied in this thesis suggests that there were common sexualised street names, and known 'red light areas' within towns, such as the Barnwell brothels in Cambridge. However, the brothels in Barnwell were not municipally owned, like those on the continent, and overall there were few municipally owned brothels in medieval England. In France, municipally owned brothels were set up in Dijon to prevent gang rapes, and measures were set up to protect the women.[579] In Germany too, regulations attempted to protect the women, and men accused of assaulting prostitutes could end up in prison. However, the women were under strict regulations themselves, and those found soliciting outside the brothels could face banishment, branding and mutilation.[580]

Although regulated brothels were found in Sandwich, Southwark and Southampton, these undeniably made up the minority.[581] Brothels and bawdy houses

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[576] George Lillie Craik, *The Pictorial History of England, Vol II* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1850), p. 905.
[577] James J. Fishman, 'The Political Use of Private Benevolence: The Statute of Charitable Uses', *Pace Law Faculty Publications*, 487 (2008), 1-61 <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/487> (p. 12).
[578] Ibid, p. 13.
[579] Karras, *Prostitution in Medieval Europe*, pp. 243-260 (p. 246).
[580] Wiesner, pp. 101-3 and p.109.
[581] See introduction, pp. 16-7. Karras, *Common Women*, p. 35.

that did exist in English towns were smaller than those on the continent, and were unregulated. This suggests how unusual Southwark, Southampton and Sandwich were at dealing with prostitution. Unlike middle-sized towns in England which attempted to regulate casual prostitution, these three towns followed the examples set by the continent, in which brothels were allowed, but had strict rules, and therefore could provide both moral and financial benefits to the towns.

Although most towns in England did not have regulated brothels, local councils allowed the existence of streets where punters and young lovers could go to engage in illicit sex. These lanes and streets often had sexualised names such as *Grope Lane* and *Love Lane*, advertising their commodity like other occupationally named streets, such as *Oyster Row*. These streets were rarely marginal, had easy access to the market, churches and colleges, and were within the town walls. When compared to other towns not studied in this thesis, which likewise had sexualised street names, these similarities become ever more apparent. Bristol had both a *Grope Lane* and a *Love Lane*. Unlike the towns studied in this thesis, the *Grope Lane* here was not centrally located, though as in Great Yarmouth, prostitutes in the town were forced to wear striped hoods.[582] York too had a *Grope Lane*, and like Shrewsbury, the name survived. In York, *Grope Lane* was situated with easy access to the town's most prominent taverns, and like Colchester, this led to strict regulations to prevent these being used as soliciting sites. Additionally, the town authorities used banishment in severe cases.[583] London had both a *Grope Lane* and *Cocks Lane*, in addition to four *Love Lanes*, and punishments ranged from banishment to the potential loss of a hand, depending on the severity of the crime.[584]

To conclude, I would argue that the evidence from these towns shows that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were particular streets, or areas, within English provincial towns, in which illicit sex was tolerated, and that in some cases, local councils designated specific areas for prostitution in an attempt to regulate and control it. As Holt and Baker suggest, the 'linguistic uniformity' of the lane's names, alongside their uniform 'relationship to the physical and economic geography of the towns' is striking. But Holt and Baker's research has focused predominately on *Grope Lanes*.

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[582] Holt and Baker, 'A Geography of Sexual Encounter', pp. 202-3 and p. 208; Coates and Scherr, 'Some Place-Names in Medieval and Early-Modern Bristol', 155-196 (pp. 162-3); Goldberg, 'Pigs and Prostitutes', p. 174.
[583] Ibid., pp. 202-3; Jones, *York, The Making of a City,* pp. 304-5; Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy*, p. 151; Karras, *Common Women*, p. 15-18.
[584] Ibid., pp. 202-3; *Calendar of Letter-Books, Letter Book H,* p. 402; Coates and Scherr, 'Some Place-Names in Medieval and Early-Modern Bristol', 155-196 (p. 163); Karras, *Common Women*, p. 15-18.

What is even more striking, from the towns studied in this thesis, is that these towns often had other streets, also sexually named, where sexual activity was likewise tolerated. These streets were likewise centrally located and recurred frequently in many parts of the country, like the notorious *Grope Lanes*. Although more research is necessary, it indicates to me that in medieval England, sexualised areas within towns were common-place, and prostitution was tolerated by local communities who understood its moral and financial benefits. Although these liaisons may have taken place in alleyways, these were not marginal, and prostitution was not a 'back-alley' industry, as it is today.

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