

Minchery Farm Sandford on Thames Oxford City



Historic Building and Archaeological Assessment



Oxford Archaeology

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Minchery Farm, Sandford on Thames

Oxford City

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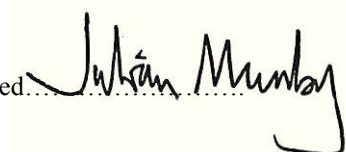
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**MINCHERY FARM, SANDFORD ON THAMES
OXFORD CITY**

Historic Building and Archaeological Assessment

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Fig. 1 Minchery Farm: Dated Building Plan

MINCHERY FARM, SANDFORD ON THAMES
OXFORD CITY

Historic Building and Archaeological Assessment

SUMMARY

This is an historic building and archaeological assessment of the site and environs of the Grade II Minchery Farm, Sandford on Thames, a remaining part of the medieval nunnery known as Littlemore Priory. The assessment has been undertaken for Oxford United in relation to the development of the adjacent site as an hotel. The archaeological potential of the site has been well established in the course of the development of adjacent sites for the Stadium and Leisure Centre, and can properly be dealt with in the same manner as those sites, and the site of the priory church avoided. The listed building is an important remnant of the medieval nunnery and post-medieval farmhouse, and has been relatively well-preserved despite modern changes. No changes are currently intended to the listed building, and there are existing or blocked openings the historic structure that will allow it to be used with the new building. The setting of the building need not be damaged by a new building of appropriate design, and can be enhanced by careful landscaping of its surroundings.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) has been asked by Oxford United Football Club to provide an assessment of the historic building and archaeological issues relating to the development of land adjacent to the Grade II* Minchery Farm, the site of the former Littlemore Priory. An outline application is being made for the land, but no changes are currently envisaged to the listed building.

1.1.2 The aim of this report is to give a clear view of the archaeological potential of the development site, and the impact of the development on the listed building.

1.1.3 Relevant issues for consideration are the archaeological potential of the land (both for prehistoric and Roman periods and the remains of the medieval priory), and the fabric and setting of the listed building. Given the previous assessment, evaluations and excavations or watching briefs conducted in and around the site of the Stadium and Leisure Centre it has not been thought necessary to do more than summarise the latest position with regard to the archaeological potential of the site, and only discuss in detail the possible site of the lost church and monastic buildings.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1 The archaeological desk-top study previously produced has been reviewed, and checked for archaeological data and events since the date of its production.
- 1.2.2 The site was visited on 24 April 2003, and a preliminary investigation was made of the listed farmhouse and the remains of the unlisted and burnt-out farm buildings (the former Minchery Farm Country Club). The farmhouse and buildings were subject to a rapid visual appraisal, using an existing drawn survey of the farmhouse.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The land immediately to the north and east of Minchery Farm has been subject to recent archaeological and extensive investigation by means of trial trenching and geophysical survey (summarised in RPS Clouston 1998).
- 2.1.2 Finds of probable Bronze Age flint were recovered from ploughsoil contexts and later features *c* 200m north of the proposed development site, and Bronze Age pottery was also recovered from a posthole *c* 300m to the east (*ibid*, 20).
- 2.1.3 Residual sherds of Iron Age pottery were also found to the north and east of the proposed development site. Any associated archaeological features were presumed to have been probably destroyed by later ploughing.
- 2.1.4 The proposed development site lies within a broad zone of Roman activity related to the pottery industry, with kilns and other features discovered across Littlemore and Blackbird Leys. Much of the area examined to the north and east of the proposed development site included Roman pottery scattered through buried ploughsoils. Also located were Roman pottery kilns and associated facilities some 350m east of the proposed development site (*ibid*, 22), and a pattern of ditched field boundaries *c* 200m to the north. Clusters of Roman pottery finds *c* 200m to the east may indicate another kiln site.
- 2.1.5 No evidence of Early Medieval archaeology has been detected in the environs of the proposed development site either by archaeological investigations or by chance finds
- 2.1.6 The Later Medieval Benedictine Priory lay to the south of the present farm buildings. A church and cemetery are likely to have existed to the north of the Priory, with fishponds further north, and pasture fields to the north and east. The recent trial trenching located scatters of medieval pottery and tile in ploughsoils, or as residual material in later features. Probable Medieval features were also located, including postholes, pits, ditches and a possible fishpond *c* 150m north of the proposed development site. No features associated with any of the possible Later Medieval buildings were uncovered.
- 2.1.7 The archaeological investigations uncovered a pattern of post-medieval ditches denoting field boundaries, the majority of which could be linked to features depicted on various historic maps. Structural features uncovered *c* 100m to the

east of the proposed development site were interpreted as part of a possible enclosure wall to the post-medieval farm. Also located in trial trenches and by geophysical survey were several post-medieval trackways.

- 2.1.8 The proposed development site may be assessed as of low potential to include prehistoric or Early Medieval archaeology, of low to moderate potential to include Roman archaeology, of high potential to include Later Medieval archaeology (particularly burials within the Priory yard or structural features of the Priory), and of high potential to include features relating to the post-medieval use of the site as a farm.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The priory was founded by Richard de Sandford in the mid 12th century, and endowed with six virgates of land and four acres of pasture (Lobel 1957, 269). Land in this part of the manor of Sandford had previously been given to the Abbey of Abingdon, as recorded in various charters of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries. Formally known as the Priory of St. Nicholas, it was commonly known as the Minchery, after the Old English term *mynececi*, meaning nun or nunnery (Page 1907, 75). It remained a comparatively small Priory, with a prioress, six nuns and three lay boarders recorded in 1445, and a Prioress and five nuns recorded in 1517. The priory was probably rebuilt in the mid or late 15th, after the dormitory was described as ruinous in 1445. It is possible that the dormitory was divided into a series of cells during this phase of rebuilding.
- 3.1.2 Various documents of the 15th and 16th century describe or note that the Priory buildings included a dormitory, parlour, cloister, a refectory, chapterhouse, lavatorium and a church. It is likely that the Priory would also have a kitchen, infirmary and a sacristy. Accounts from visits in the early 18th century indicate something of what survived at that time: Hearne notes fishponds to the north or west of the main structure, a dovecote and a cemetery. An account of the late 17th century suggests that human burials had been found at the north end of the surviving medieval building.
- 3.1.3 Taken together as a body of evidence, all of the accounts and illustrations of the 17th, 18th and 19th century indicate that human burials may survive close to the north end of the surviving structure (in the general conjectured location of the church), and that outbuildings or barns survived into the mid 19th century to the north-east and west of the main structure. The function and date of origin of these outbuildings is uncertain. WA Pantin produced a possible plan of the Priory buildings but this largely conjectural (1970).

4 HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The farmhouse lies on the south side of the modern farmyard as represented on 19th-century maps, but may originally have faced another yard on the west side. It consists of a single north-south range, with its front door facing west.

4.2 The Farmhouse

4.2.1 The farmhouse is stone-built, of medieval origins, but substantially rebuilt in the 17th century, of two storeys, with attics, and a clay tile roof. The more modernised front, with the front door and stair turret, faced west, as previously mentioned, but there was no attempt at symmetry. The east wall retains much medieval fabric, with random rubble above an offset plinth, and a row of single-light trefoiled windows on the first floor. The south wall has a mixture of rubble and ashlar, partly banded, with a shallow offset plinth, and the west wall is of coursed rubble. It would appear likely that the south and west walls were rebuilt when the building was converted by the installation of chimneys and a new roof, perhaps around 1600. The northern bay of the farmhouse (not included on Pantin's plan) was an addition of perhaps 18th or 19th-century date, also in rubble. It may have been open on the north side, with a timber-framed infill, since there are straight joints on either side..

4.2.2 The *ground-floor interior* has been somewhat changed since 1970 by the removal of modern partitions, but the original fabric is clear enough to be seen. From the soffits (undersides) of the ceiling beams the indications are that there was an entrance hall on the left of the front door (possibly unheated), with the stair turret opening off the hall, and a partition on the right with a door into a parlour (the location of the partition can be seen in the chamfer-stops on the main north-south beam). The parlour had a large fireplace (now renewed) and was panelled, judging from the presence of chamfered wall plates below the ceilings. The room beyond may have been an inner parlour and was also panelled, and possibly had an elaborate ceiling (but these beams are now boxed-in). Alternatively, given that there is a large chimney stack at this end, this may have been a kitchen.

4.2.3 The arrangements at the north end of the building are partly obscured by modern fittings in the bar and kitchen, but there is presumably an old wall between the bar and kitchen, and a fireplace in the kitchen/bar store. Since 1970 the door next the staircase has been removed, and an opening has been made in the north wall into the 18th/19th-century extension (while on the outer wall of the extension there is a blocked door showing that there was an external access here).

4.2.4 On the *first floor* there has been comparatively little change to the plan as shown in 1970. At the north end the lobby has been divided/created, and a bathroom has been inserted where a partition and modern chimney stack have been removed. Otherwise the plan remains the same, with a broad corridor along the west side giving access to the other rooms. The date of the corridor and room divisions is hard to determine, but some parts of the structure may well be of 16th or 17th-century date, (the character of the framed divisions

could be determined by opening up and investigating). The fireplace in the (N) room is visible, but if there was one in the room above the parlour it has been covered over. As previously mentioned, the windows on the east side are the medieval trefoiled openings, partly modified. On the west are a variety of windows, some with ovolo mouldings (characteristic of the early 17th century), and some repaired in the 20th century. As on the ground floor, an opening from the north end of the farmhouse has been made since 1970, linking though to the north extension. The north extension has a plain interior, with modern windows, and a partly obscured roof truss.

- 4.2.5 In the *attic stage* there is little evidence of recent change, or indeed of any change. The roof has queen-post trusses with three purlins butted to the principal rafters, and probably dates from around 1600. The attic was at one time fully used (the original stair ascends to the attic level), and was whitewashed and probably had a ceiling. To affect access cut through some of the trusses to different parts a series of doorways were cut through the tie-beams. These do not seem to have had a very serious effect on the structure of the roof, which appears to be in good order.

4.3 Farm Buildings

- 4.3.1 The farm buildings shown on the 18th-century view by Burghers lay mostly to the west of the farm, with a barn to the north-east of the farmhouse. An outlying dovecote lay to the south-west.
- 4.3.2 By the time of the 1849 estate plan (RPS Report Fig. 5) there was one barn to the north-west of the farmhouse, and by the OS first edition plan of 1876 (RPS Report Fig. 6) this had been extended east and southwards, and a square had also been made with the barn north-east of the farmhouse. By the 1899 OS map the last survival of the range west of the farmhouse had disappeared, and further ranges had been built on the north side of the existing barns (RPS Fig. 7). Modifications made in the 20th century saw these farm buildings converted to a country club, and these survived until recent destruction by fire. Photographs of the country club suggest that the oldest barn, to the north-east of the farmhouse, had been most altered and largely rebuilt.
- 4.3.3 Thus both the map evidence and the surviving remains suggest that the existing remnants of farm buildings were of no great age or significance, and the one barn of greatest potential had already been rebuilt.

4.4 The lost Priory Buildings

- 4.4.1 As interpreted by Pantin (Fig. 9) the existing farmhouse range forms the east side of the monastic cloister, and this remains by far the most likely interpretation (the next possibility is that it formed the west side of the cloister, though the disposition of doors and windows makes this less likely). In either case the church would have run along the north side of the range, with the more recent north end of the range either forming the south transept of the

church, or standing wholly within the church. Since the priory was a modest nunnery the church may not have been large, but would have extended both eastwards beyond the existing range, and westwards along the north side of the cloister. The cloister would have had buildings attached to it on all sides, with a west range most probably beneath the present road (or on the west side of the road), and a south range within the garden to the south-west of the farmhouse.

5 THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The Proposals

5.1.1 The proposed development consists of a new building to the north and west of the Minchery Farm, with a carpark behind it. A smaller link block will connect the north end of the farmhouse with the main building. To the west of the farmhouse will be a garden and access area up to the road, while to the east of the farmhouse there will be a landscaped garden.

5.2 Impact on Buried Archaeology

5.2.1 The main new building and carpark will be in an area of general archaeological potential, although partly disturbed by the buildings of the former farmyard and country club. The proposed development site may be assessed as of low potential to include prehistoric or Early Medieval archaeology, of low to moderate potential to include Roman archaeology, of high potential to include Later Medieval archaeology (particularly burials within the Priory yard or for remains of outbuildings associated with the medieval priory), and of high potential to include features relating to the post-medieval use of the site as a farm. The more significant phases would be Roman period, and the medieval Priory phase.

5.2.2 Any archaeological remains can be dealt with by prior investigation and prospection, and mitigation in the form of foundation design or where necessary excavation and watching brief, as agreed with the Oxford City Archaeologist.

5.3 The Medieval Priory

5.3.1 The principal remains of the medieval priory are the existing farmhouse, (thought to be the east side of the cloister), the site of the church running across its north end, and the site of the cloister in the garden area to the west and extending under the road. Other outbuildings most probably lay to the south of the church and cloister, but possibly also to the east and west of the farmhouse. The exact extent of the church is uncertain, and it may be desirable to establish this by archaeological investigation, to minimise any possible damage from the new link building by informing the design for the layout and foundations of the new building. There should be no need for ground disturbance within the area of the former cloister, but any upgrading of the

road along the western edge of the site (including laying of new services along the road) could be damaging to buried remains of the west side of the cloister. Again, as with the church, it may be possible to investigate the location and plan of any remains of the west side of the cloister, at least to discover their depth and character, so that any damage can be avoided, if necessary by moving the road (if this were done, it would be a major benefit if the whole area of the cloister could be represented by a garden or grassed area).

5.4 **Impact on the Listed Building**

- 5.4.1 The listed building has two aspects: that of medieval priory and post-medieval farmhouse, the former best represented on the eastern side of the building where the medieval windows can be seen, and the latter from the south and west sides of the building. Little remains of any historic setting now that the farm buildings have gone, though some mature trees give an attractive visual aspect to the environs of the building; in other respects the existing setting of the building is degraded by the proximity of roads, derelict land, and a large carpark. The continuing visibility and legibility of the building is important, and this will generally be ensured (and indeed enhanced) by the proposed landscaping and amelioration of the immediate environs of the building. The 'medieval' side of the priory building will thus be seen from a garden rather than a carpark, and will be considerably enhanced. The setting of the farmhouse as seen from the south and west will be affected by the new hotel buildings, but there is no reason why the design of a new building should be deleterious, and the key element is the mass and design of the link building, which can serve to offset and balance the visual connexion between the old farmhouse and new hotel.

5.5 **Conclusion**

- 5.5.1 Overall, the development at Minchery Farm provides an opportunity for discovering more about the extent and character of the monastic remains, and thus ensuring their protection, while improving the setting of this important historic building.

Oxford Archaeology

May 2003

APPENDIX I ENTRY ON STATUTORY LIST

Location : SANDFORD ON THAMES, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE

IoE number : 246509

Date listed : 18 JUL 1963

Date of last amendment : 18 JUL 1963

SP 50 SW

1/109

18/07/63

SANDFORD-ON-THAMES

Minchery Farmhouse.

Grade II*

Farmhouse, now country club. C15 dormitory range of Littlemore Priory reconstructed c.1600.

Limestone rubble with squared dressings; old plain-tile roof with stone and brick ridge stacks. Single range running north-south with stair tower on west. 2 storeys plus attics. 5-window entrance front (west) has central doorway with 4-centre moulded stone arch and label. To right a C20 3-light window with a C20 stone-mullioned window beyond.

Between, a single light at intermediate height in line with stone stack, with ovolo-moulded surround. At first floor, mullioned windows of 2,3 and 2 lights, only that over the door having its original ovolo-moulded stonework. Left from the door is a gabled stair tower of 2 storeys with C19 window openings under stone segmental arches. To left is a further bay with re-modelled openings and a secondary entrance. A single-bay 2-storey extension from the north gable wall is probably late C18. The east front has at first floor a row of 5 evenly spaced single lights. They are probably C15 and have trefoil and cinquefoil heads in concave-chamfered rectangular surrounds. To right is a 4-light mullioned window, also concave-chamfered. At ground floor is a doorway, opposite the main entrance, with moulded 4-centre arched head. To left is a C15 window with 2 trefoil-headed lights and beyond a single light with chamfered stone surround. To right a mutilated mullioned window of 2 chamfered lights and another C15 window of 2 trefoiled-headed lights. Bay to extreme left has C20 altered openings. South gable wall with brick stack was probably rebuilt in C18.

Interior: Now much altered, but has several chamfered and stopped beams and 2-stone moulded Tudor-arched fireplaces at first floor. The early C17 dog-leg stair rising to the attics has pierced flat balusters and lantern finials and pendants. Wooden 3-centre arches with carved spandrels over the flights. The 7-bay roof has 8 heavy queen-post trusses, each with collars clasping purlins, the top collar being cambered. Views of about 1826 show mullioned windows throughout, roughly in the present arrangement, but the west front has the remains of a stone porch, and also has a Gothic-arched doorway to right of the single light former stair window.

(*V.C.H. Oxfordshire V*, pp.267-8; *Buildings of England, Oxfordshire*, pp.689-90; W.A. Pantin, 'Minchery Farm, Littlemore', *Oxoniensia* Vol 35 (1970), pp.19-26; National Monuments Record).

APPENDIX II BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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RPS Clouston Minchery Farm Buildings: Archaeological Desk Top Appraisal,
(Abingdon 1998)

APPENDIX III W.A. PANTIN ARTICLE ON MINCHERY FARM

[*Oxoniensia* Vol. XXXV, 1971]

APPENDIX III W.A. PANTIN ARTICLE ON MINCHERY FARM

[*Oxoniensia* Vol. XXXV, 1971]Minchery Farm, Littlemore¹

By W. A. PANTIN

THE Priory of St. Nicholas, Littlemore, commonly known as the Minchery (from the Old English 'mynecu' or 'minschen', a nun), was a small house of Benedictine nuns, founded in the reign of Stephen by Robert de Sandford.² It was never a large house so far as we know; in 1445 there were a prioress and six nuns and three lay boarders; in 1517 a prioress and five nuns.³ The priory was suppressed by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525, and part of the buildings subsequently became a farmhouse. There were considerable remains in the early 18th century, as described by Hearne,⁴ but the only part of the priory buildings now remaining above ground is a long building about 77 feet long by 21 feet wide internally, lying north and south, which was until recently occupied as a farmhouse (PLS. VII, VIII; plan, FIG. 7; sections, FIG. 8). This clearly represents the eastern range of the cloister garth, and would have contained the dormitory on the first floor, and the chapter house and other rooms on the ground floor. It was probably rebuilt in the middle or second half of the 15th century, as at a visitation in 1445 the dormitory was described as so ruinous that the nuns were afraid to sleep there.⁵ Of the 15th century work the most notable remains are in the east wall: two windows (PL. VIIC, 9 and 12 on plan) and a moulded plinth on the ground floor, and a series of five small windows at regular intervals on the first floor (PLS. VIIIA and B, 22-26 on plan). These windows would have lit the dormitory; such windows at regular intervals were a characteristic feature of monastic dormitories, each window lighting a bed-space or cell. The dormitory at Littlemore may have been divided into a series of cells or cubicles when it was rebuilt in the 15th century.⁶ At the 1445 visitation it had been complained

¹ Thanks are due to the present occupants, to Mr. P. S. Spokes for photographs, and to the members of the Oxford University Archaeological Society who helped to survey this building in 1956. The plans show the building as it was in 1956; since then it has been restored, some modern partitions have been altered or removed, the two northern chimney stacks have been lowered, and an external door made in the southern gable wall.

² *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, II, 75. The priory church was being rebuilt in 1245.

³ *Visitations of Religious houses in the diocese of Lincoln* (1420-49), ed. A. H. Thompson (Lincoln Record Society, 14, 1918), II, 217-8; *Visitations in the diocese of Lincoln, 1517-31*, ed. A. H. Thompson (Lincoln Record Society, 37, 1947), III, 8-12 (cited below as *Visitations*).

⁴ See below, p. 26.

⁵ *Visitations* (1420-39), II, 217-8.

⁶ For the development of separate cells or chambers in nunneries, see Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 318 ff; for examples of the furnishing of such chambers at Minster in Sheppey, see *Archaeologia Cantiana*, VII (1868), 296 ff.

W. A. PANTIN

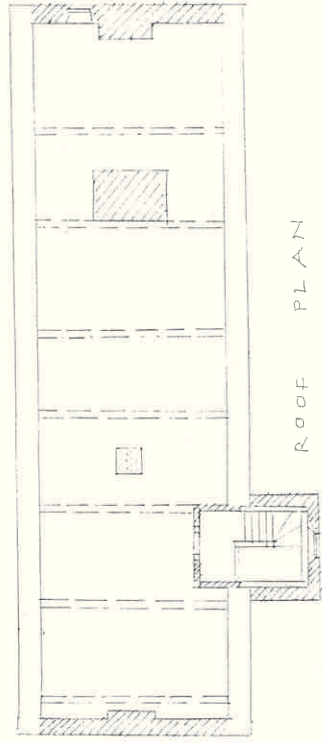
that the nuns were sleeping two in a bed, even the prioress having to share her bed with a nun ;⁷ this over-crowding (though normal by lay standards) was perhaps due to the need to make room for the lay boarders, who would be a financial necessity. The rebuilt dormitory would have provided plenty of room. The spacing of the windows suggests that the dormitory contained seven bays, each about 10 to 12 feet wide. The whole of the northern-most bay (about 21 feet by 16 feet) may have been the prioress's room, unless she had a separate lodging in the western range of the cloister ; a visitation record of 1517 refers to the prioress's ' parlour ', which contained her bed.⁸ The other six bays of the dormitory could have contained six cells on each side of a central passage, each cell being about 10 by 8 feet. There must have been stairs up from the cloister, but we cannot now trace their position. Nor can we trace the original internal divisions of the ground floor ; this presumably

⁷ *Visitations* (1420-39), II, 217-8.

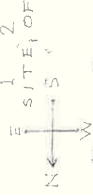
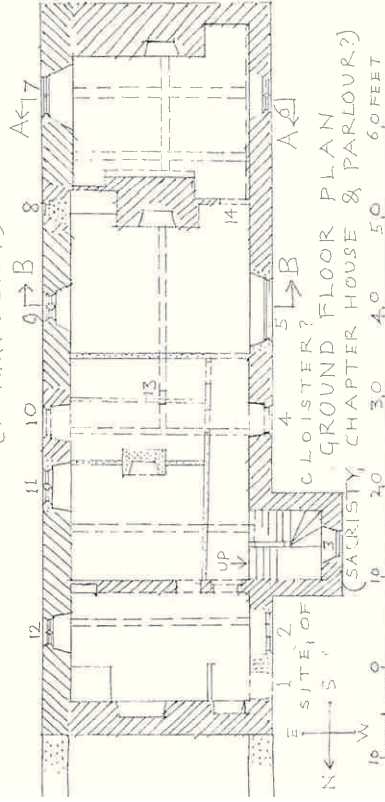
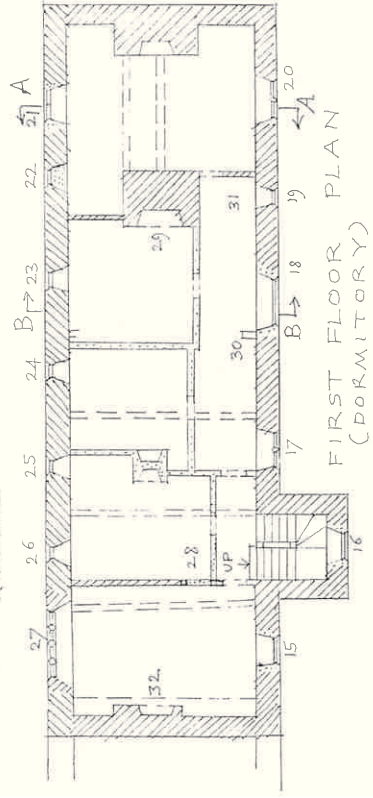
⁸ *Visitations* (1517-31), III, 9.

KEY TO PLANS OPPOSITE

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(1) Door with wooden lintel (18th/19th cent.).</p> <p>(2) Three-light window with wooden frame (18th/19th cent.).</p> <p>(3) Two-light window with segmental head (18th/19th cent.).</p> <p>(4) Door with four-centred arch, stop chamfer moulding and drip mould (c. 1600).</p> <p>(5) Modernized window.</p> <p>(6) Two-light window with ovolo mould and drip mould (c. 1600, recut?).</p> <p>(7) Modernized window.</p> <p>(8) Blocked window, single-light, with plain chamfer (c. 1600).</p> <p>(9) Two-light window with trefoil head (15th cent.).</p> <p>(10) Door with four-centred arch, stop chamfer moulding, no drip mould (c. 1600).</p> <p>(11) Two-light window with plain chamfer (19th cent.?).</p> <p>(12) Two-light window with trefoil (15th cent.).</p> <p>(13) Position of post, now removed.</p> <p>(14) Site of former stairs?</p> | <p>(<i>First floor</i>)</p> <p>(15) Two-light windows with segmental heads (18th/19th cent.).</p> <p>(17) Two-light window with ovolo moulding (c. 1600).</p> <p>(18) Modernized window.</p> <p>(19) Single-light window with ovolo moulding (c. 1600), originally lighting stairs.</p> <p>(20) Two-light window (c. 1600 recut?).</p> <p>(21) Modernized window.</p> <p>(22) Single-light window, blocked, with cinquefoil head (15th cent.).</p> <p>(23)-(25) Single-light windows with cinquefoil heads (15th cent.).</p> <p>(26) Single-light window with trefoil head (15th cent.).</p> <p>(27) Four-light window (c. 1600).</p> <p>(28) Blocked door (c. 1600).</p> <p>(29) Stone fireplace with four-centred arch and stop chamfer moulding (c. 1600).</p> <p>(30) Wooden corbel or brace supporting tie beam.</p> <p>(31) Site of former stairs?</p> <p>(32) Small stone fireplace with four-centred arch (c. 1600).</p> |
|---|--|



ROOF PLAN



10 20 30 40 50 60 FEET

15TH CENTURY C.1600 LATER
AINCHERY FARM, LITTLEMORE

FIG. 7

contained the chapter-house and the parlour (referred to in visitation records),⁹ with perhaps a small sacristy at the north end of the range. The visitation records also refer to the cloister and the refectory; in 1445 the nuns were ordered to eat in the refectory on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays;¹⁰ this may imply that on the other days they might use another room (a misericord) set aside for meat-eating, unless perhaps they used the parlour for this. As at other nunneries, children were taken in as boarders; in 1445 the nuns

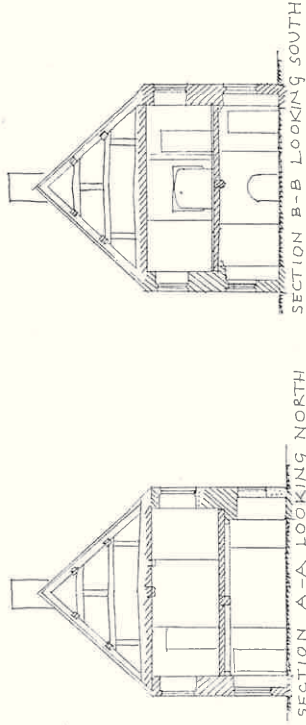


FIG. 8

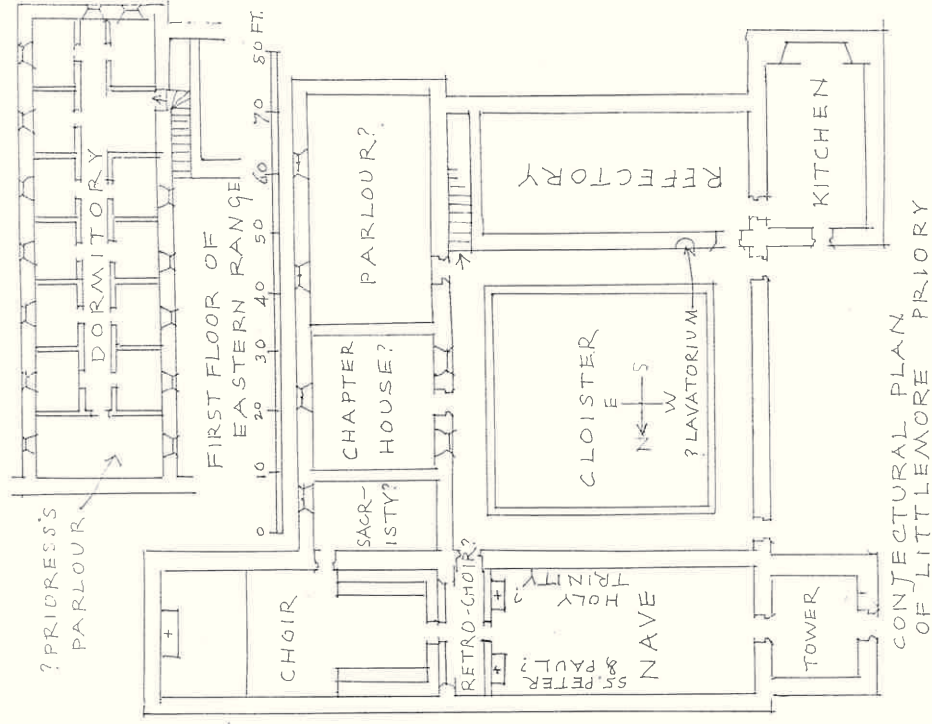
were enjoined to take no boys over nine years and no girls over twelve; in 1517-8 a boy of seven or eight was mentioned as accompanying the prioress on her walks, and one of the nuns was accused of romping (*Ludendo et luctando*) with the boys in the cloister.¹¹ There were also complaints of more serious disorders which help to explain the early suppression of the nunnery.

About 1600 (or soon after), after the building had passed into secular use, there was extensive reconstruction: the west wall, which would have been disfigured by the remains of the cloister and of the abutment of the refectory range, was probably entirely rebuilt; the staircase wing was added; new floors and chimney stacks were inserted; and the roof was reconstructed, except that the tie-beams may go back to the 15th century. Good features of the 1600 reconstruction are the stairs with their carved balusters, newel

⁹ *Visitationes* (1517-31), III, 11-12. There is no evidence here of a division into several (*cellulae* or households) for meals, as at some other nunneries (cf. E. Power, *op. cit.*, p. 317 f.); perhaps Littlemore was too small for that.

¹¹ *Visitationes* (1420-39), II, 218; (1517-31), III, 10-11; for the reception of boarders and pupils at nunneries, see E. Power, *op. cit.*, pp. 302 ff.

MINCHERY FARM, LITTLEMORE



CONJECTURAL PLAN OF LITTLEMORE PRIORY

FIG. 9

posts and arched heads (PL. VIIIID) ; a stone fireplace on the first floor (2.9 on plan) ; the two main doors (4. and 10 on plan) ; and some of the windows (e.g. 6, 8, 17, 19 on plan). It is possible that there was some kind of 'screens passage' between the east and west doors on the ground floor (4. and 10 on plan), with perhaps the hall to the south and the parlour beyond, and the kitchen at the north end. The position of a window (19 on plan) suggests that there was a small secondary staircase in the thickness of the chimney stack between the hall and the parlour (1.4 and 31 on plan). There is a short extension to the north end of the range, which seems to have no medieval features and may represent an addition or rebuilding of the 18th century.

Until excavations have been made, it is difficult to say much definitely about the priory plan as a whole, though something may be conjectured from surviving descriptions of other small nunneries.¹² The priory church seems to have been to the north of the cloister and dormitory range ; the building to the north east, which Hearne identified as the chapter-house, may in fact have been the remains of the choir.¹³ In a small nunnery of this type, the church may well have consisted simply of a parallelogram about 21 feet wide by 60 to 80 feet long, containing choir and nave, without aisles and without transepts ; a small community of nuns would need few side-altars. The refectory was presumably on the south side of the cloister, abutting on the dormitory range ; and to the west of this was the convent kitchen, the chimney of which survived in Hearne's time. Whether there was a prioress's lodging or guest-house on the west of the cloister, we cannot tell.

The legacies of Thomas Mokking, a London citizen, 1427-8, add some information about the priory.¹⁴ He desired to be buried in the chapel of SS. Peter and Paul there, and left money for paving the chapel of SS. Peter and Paul, the chapel of the Holy Trinity, the retro-choir, the chapter house, and the cloister ; for the repair of the *lavatorium* in the cloister (no doubt by the refectory door) ; and for oil for the lamps before St. Lawrence and the high altar, and in the choir and dormitory. The two chapels named may have been in the nave, in front of the rood screen, and the retro-choir may have been the space between the rood screen and the choir screen (a space so named by W. H. St. John Hope) ;¹⁵ Littlemore was probably too small to

¹² Cf. the description of twelve small Yorkshire priories in *Yorkshire Arch. Journal*, ix (1885-6) 196 ff., 321 ff. ; the cloisters averaged 60 feet square, the churches 60 to 80 feet long, the cloists occupying a half to two-thirds of the length.

¹³ On the conjectural plan I have shown the church abutting on the north end of the surviving dormitory range ; it is possible however that the latter may have formerly extended a bay or two further north, in which case the church would have lain a corresponding distance further north.

¹⁴ *Some Osfordshire wills*, ed. J. R. H. Weaver (Oxfordshire Record Society, 39, 1938), pp. 13-4.

¹⁵ *Archæologia*, 68, 1916-7, pp. 68-70.

have had a retro-choir in the other sense of a space east of the high altar reached by ambulatories.

After its suppression, the priory passed to Cardinal College and then, after several rapid changes, it came c. 1549-50 to the Powell family, who held it until the 18th century. The Powells did not live at the Minchery, as they had another, larger house nearby at the Preceptory at Sandford-on-Thames; they evidently let the Minchery to tenants.¹⁶ But it was perhaps the Powells rather than their tenants who were responsible for the considerable reconstruction of the house c. 1600, already mentioned.

Littlemore Priory is specially interesting because it apparently preserves the dormitory of a small nunnery, a feature which comparatively rarely survives in religious houses; it was more commonly the lodgings of the superior or the guest-house, often situated in a western range of the cloister, which were likely to survive, being most easily adaptable to domestic purposes after the Dissolution.¹⁷ Littlemore was a very small house, and if, as has been suggested, the prioress's chamber or 'parlour' was in the dormitory, it may be that there was no separate prioress's lodging in a western range, and this might explain the preservation and adaptation of the dormitory range.

Littlemore raises the general question of the planning of very small priories and cells, whether of monks or nuns, which needs more study. When small priories were founded in the 12th century, it was evidently hoped that they would grow into full-sized communities, and they were therefore provided with the standard monastic lay-out of cloister, refectory, dormitory, and so forth. This often proved over-optimistic, the houses sometimes having six inmates or less, for whom the normal claustral lay-out, with a cloister, say, 60 feet square, a dormitory or refectory 60 feet or more long, must have been unsuitable and uneconomic; to have a handful of inmates rattling about in a comparatively large and decaying building must have been demoralizing, just as the enlargement and improvements of a flourishing home would be encouraging. The realistic step for a very small community would have been to adopt a more domestic type of plan, with hall, kitchen, chambers and chapel, like a small manor-house, and there is some evidence that this was sometimes done in small cells, alien priories and granges; a good example is Salvestone Grange,

¹⁶ Edmund Powell in 1592 bequeathed to his daughter Catherine, for her life, the rent coming from the 'house and site of the minchery', at that time let to Herman Smith for £16 a year; other lands belonging to the Minchery were left to his son Edmund Powell, being late in the occupation of John Altherton at a rent of £20 a year (Bedleian MS. Wilks. Oxon. 50/160). Herman Smith, the occupant of the Minchery, was quite a substantial yeoman, leaving goods worth £24 7s. 4d. on his death in 1602 (MS. Wilks. Oxon. 50, fo. 108v.). The Powells were a recusant family; cf. B. Stapleton, *A History of the post-Reformation* (London, 1906), pp. 198-202.

¹⁷ Cf. J. C. Dickinson, 'The buildings of the English Austin Canons after the Dissolution of the Monasteries', *Journal of Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, III ser., xxxiii (1968) 60 ff, esp. pp. 69-71; cf. p. 72, on the rarity of an eastern range being adopted.

a dependency of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, and the alien priories of Ogbourne, Steventon, Wilsford and Minster Lovell.¹⁸ Finchale Priory, where the visiting monks on holiday from Durham lived in the prior's house, represents a half-way step towards this domestic plan. Similarly small communities of chantry priests were sometimes accommodated in a building planned like a manor house (as at Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Mere and Ilminster), rather than in the quadrangle plan favoured by larger colleges of chantry priests (like Thoresby College, King's Lynn). But it seems unlikely that any nunnery was sufficiently bold deliberately to adopt a domestic rather than a claustreal plan.

APPENDIX

Description of the Minchery by Thomas Hearne, in *The History and Antiquities of Glastonbury* (Oxford, 1722), pp. xvii—xxi.¹⁹ (See PL. VIII.)

Here I have several Times seen the Ruins of many Buildings, of which the Church or Chapel (now quite destroy'd) was part. The Refectory (commonly called the Hall)²⁰ in the North Part of it is still standing, tho' much altered, and divided now into more than one Room. In the said Refectory or Hall is a strange old Table (about 13 foot 10 inches in Length, and about two Foot 8 inches in Breadth) now almost decay'd, which was certainly the Table that the Nuns us'd to dine at in common, with the Prioress . . . I am told that this Table is still us'd now and then at Harvest-Homes and Sheep-Shearings, and that many Coffins and Bones have been found on the North (and North-West) Side of the House . . . one Part of the North End of the House is turn'd into a Stable. On the West Side of the whole Building is a distinct House, that hath a strange odd Chimney; but this (all but the Chimney, which seems to be of the Age of Henry VII) is of a late Erection (and was not long since a Dairy House) being built out of some of the old Ruins, the Nunnery Kitchen having been here in old Time, as the Pidgeon House, still more Westwly, was built out of other Ruins. There is a Barn on the North East end of the House, at a little Distance from it, in which I have been inform'd Coffins have been dug up. This is also a late Building (made out of other Ruins) but I believe the Chapter-House stood in the very same Place. However this may be, without doubt here was a Building that joynd to the Church.

¹⁸ Cf. M. M. Morgan, 'Inventories of three small alien priories', *Journal of Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, III, ser., IV (1939), 141–9; *Oxoniensia*, II (1937), 103 ff (Minster Lovell).

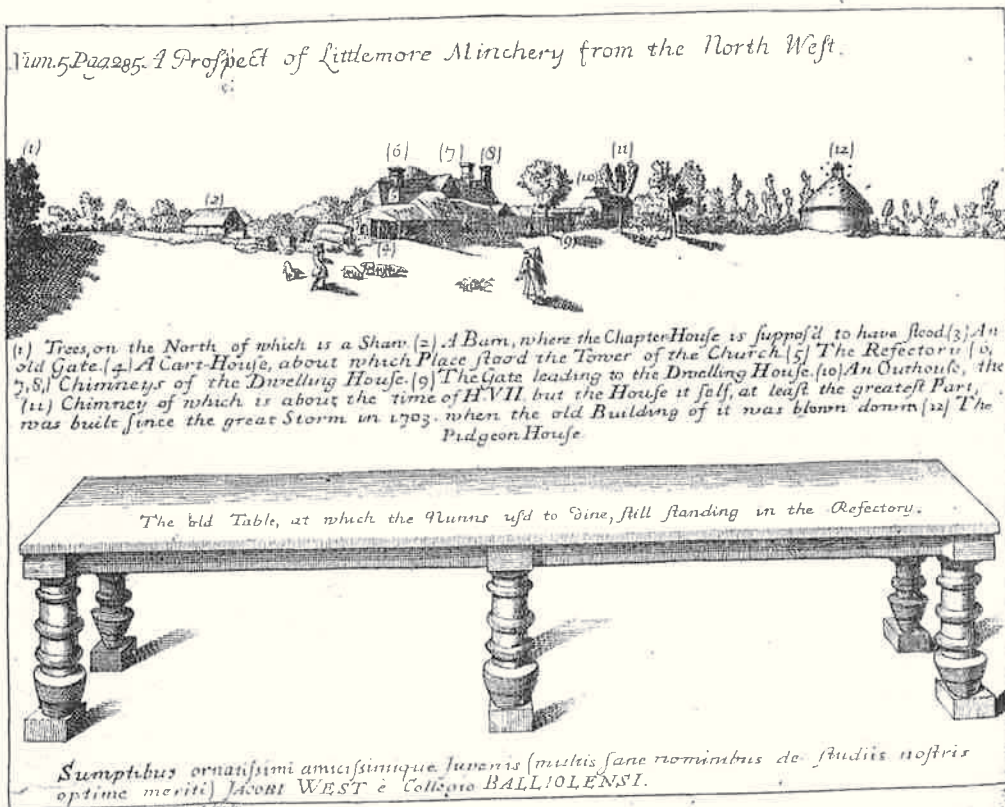
¹⁹ This account seems to be based on Hearne's visit to Lattimore in April 1722, when Anthony Yates was farmer; *Hears's Collections*, Oxford Hist. Soc., 46 (1906), viii, 351–3; cf. also Anthony Wood's description in 1661, *Wood's Life and Times*, Oxford Hist. Soc., 19 (1691), I, 404.

²⁰ This identification with the refectory seems mistaken; it is more likely to represent the chapter house or parlour. Wood (*loc. cit.*) calls it the common hall. The table, to judge from Hearne's illustration, looks post-dissolution.

PLATE VII

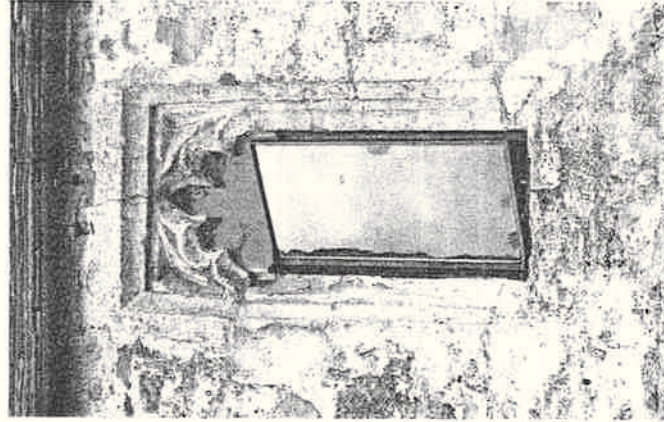


A : Minchery Farm, Littlemore : Dormitory range, from the east, showing the windows of the cells on the first floor (22-26 on plan).
Photo : P. S. Spokes

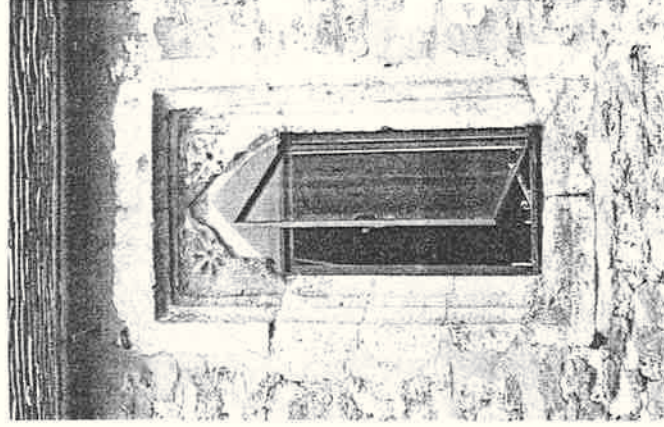


B : Minchery Farm, Littlemore : view from the north-west, in 1722, by M. Burghers (from Thomas Hearne, *The History and Antiquities of Glastonbury*, Oxford, 1722).

PLATE VIII

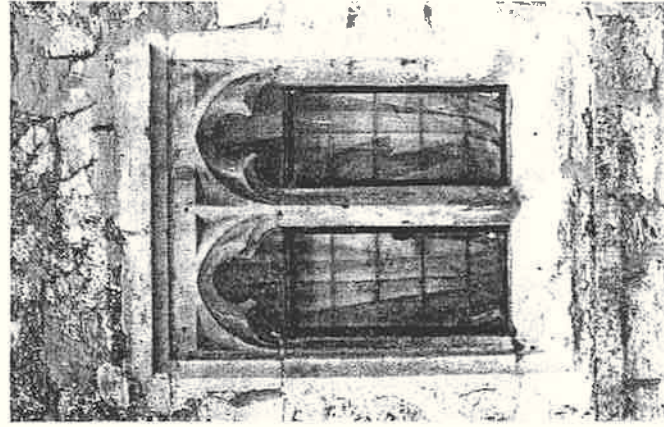


A. B : Minchery Farm, Littlemore : 15th-century windows of the cells in the dormitory (23, 24 on plan).



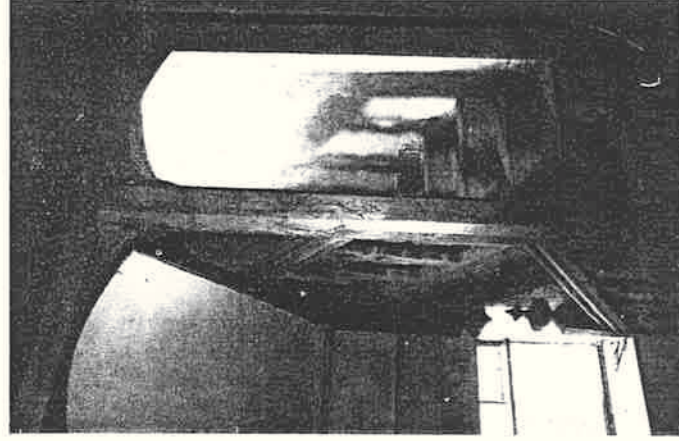
C : Minchery Farm, Littlemore : 15th-century two-light window on ground floor of dormitory range (12 on plan).

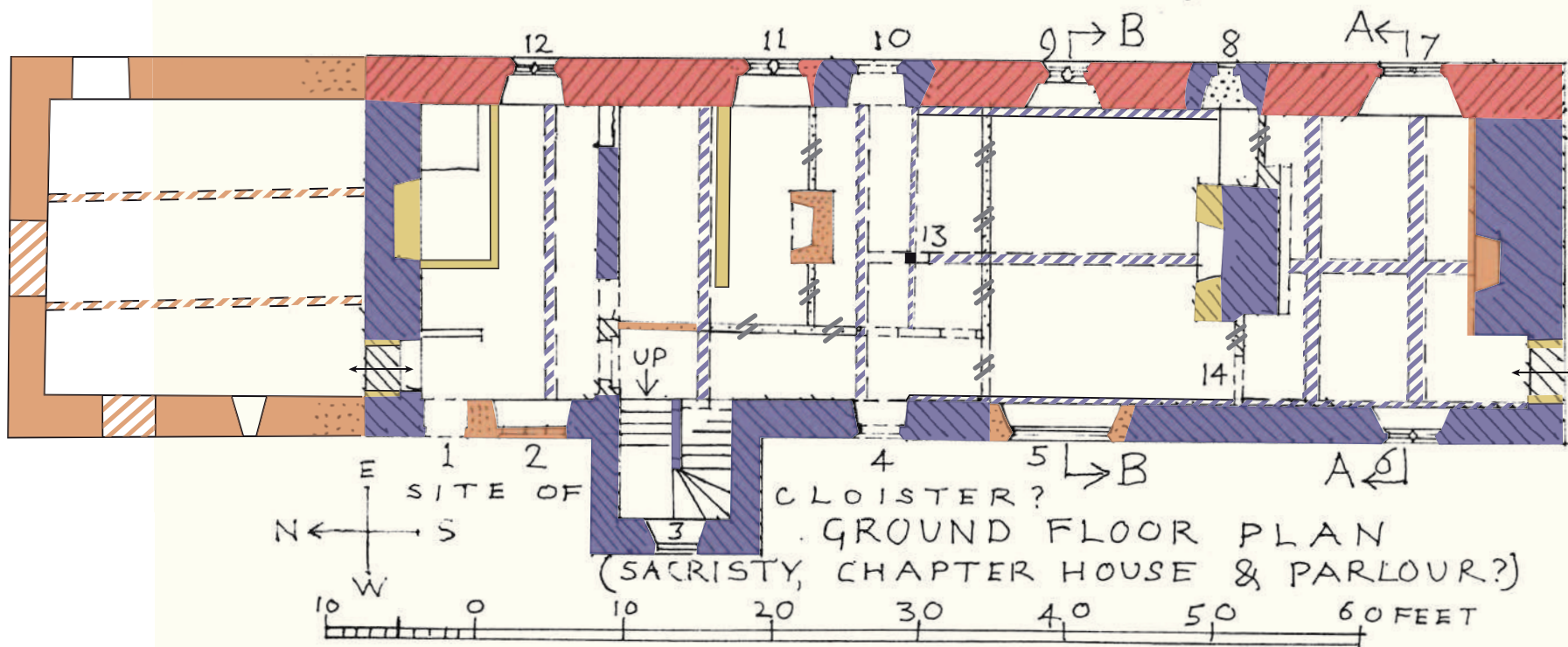
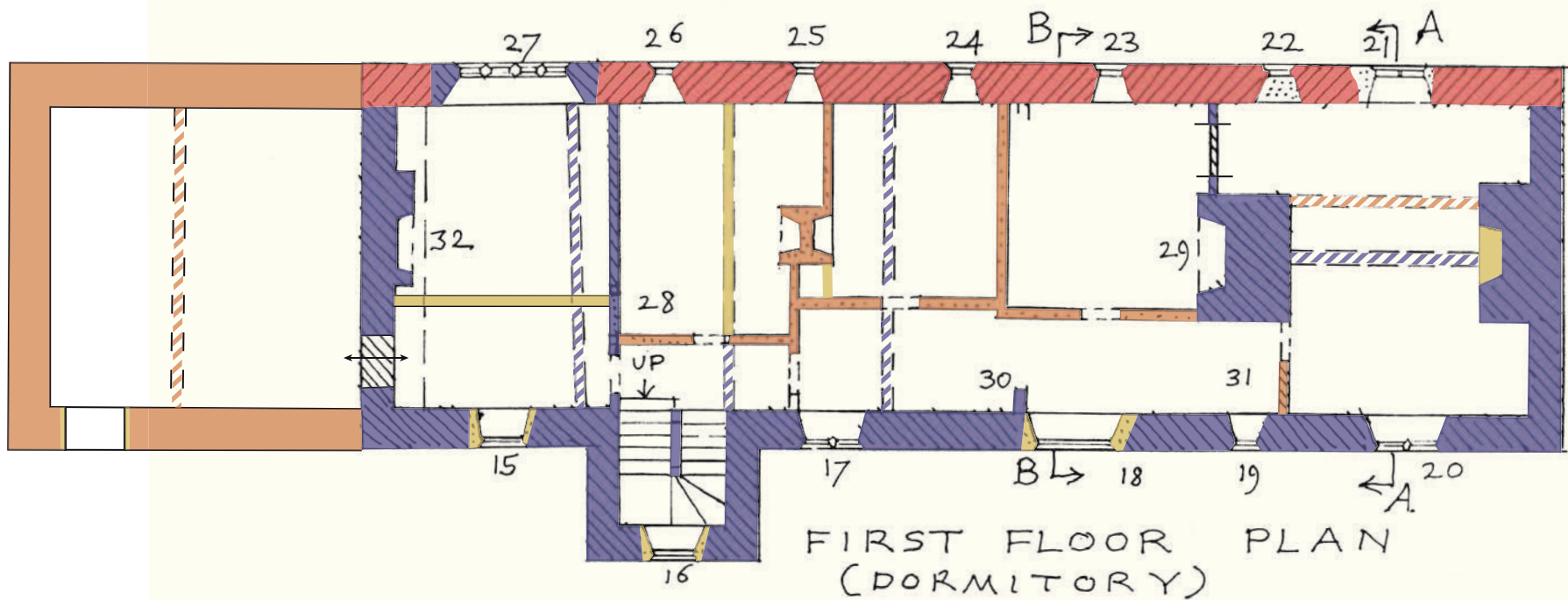
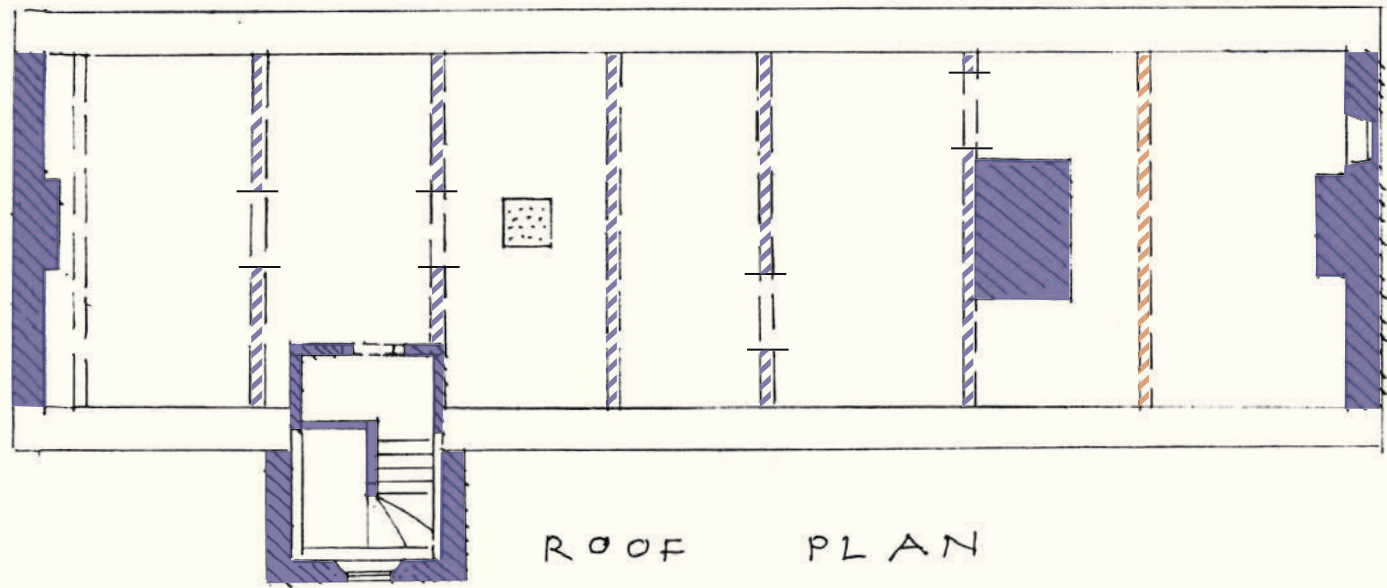
Photo : P. S. Spinks



D : Minchery Farm, Littlemore : 17th-century staircase on the west side, at first floor level.

Photo : P. S. Spinks





15TH CENTURY
 c.1600
 LATER
 MODERN

MINCHERY FARM, LITTLEMORE



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