



Pro anacorita —Identifying Individuality in London's Anchorites, 1200–1550

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RESEARCH



ABSTRACT

Anchorites, Christian recluses who lived in cells typically attached to the sides of ecclesiastical structures, were a fixture of ascetic religious life in medieval Northwestern Europe, especially England. However, despite anchorites' prominent place in Christian society throughout the Middle Ages, they have been markedly understudied by historians. This project, which focuses on the anchorites found within the bounds of the City of London—that is, the area of London largely surrounded by the Roman wall—addresses this lacuna by establishing what can be known about individual anchorites in London from 1200–1550 and exploring how London's parish geography factored into the roles and lives of anchorites. Through rhetorical analysis of lay/merchant wills, anchorite wills, royal decrees and bequests, Church approvals of enclosures, and Henry VIII's Chantry Certificates, this study will illuminate the unique religiosity of the medieval world of recluses, as well as attempt to give anchorites, especially female anchorites, something rarely afforded to them—treatment as individuals.

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KEYWORDS:

anchorites; medieval;
christianity; religion; gender
studies

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Riggs, Carson. "Pro anacorita —Identifying Individuality in London's Anchorites, 1200–1550." *The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (2023): pp. 14–26.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/vtuhr.v12i1.186>



Figure 1 Anchorhold at All Saints Church, King's Lynn, Norfolk, England.¹

Anchorites, Christian recluses who lived in cells typically attached to the sides of ecclesiastical structures, are a fixture of ascetic religious life in medieval Northwestern Europe, especially England. However, despite anchorites' prominent place in Christian society throughout the Middle Ages, they are markedly understudied by historians.² This project, which focuses on the anchorites found within the bounds of the City of London—that is, the area of London largely surrounded by the Roman wall—addresses this lacuna by establishing what can be known about individual anchorites in London from 1200–1550 and exploring how London's parish geography factored into the roles and lives of anchorites. Through a rhetorical analysis of lay/merchant wills, anchorite wills, royal decrees, and bequests, Church approvals of enclosures, and Henry VIII's Chantry Certificates, this study illuminates the unique religiosity of the medieval world of recluses and attempts to give anchorites, especially female anchorites, something rarely afforded to them—treatment as individuals.

Understanding the idiosyncrasies of medieval English piety and worship allows us to understand the commonplace structures of the medieval Church and local anchoritic traditions.³ The term anchoritism—derived from the Greek verb *anachōrein* (ἀναχωρεῖν), meaning to withdraw—existed as a form of Christian devotion since the advent of Christianity itself. However, the particular type of anchoritism studied in detail here, in which a devotee would wall him or herself

into a small cell attached to a holy structure, is a unique product of the High and Late Middle Ages (1000–1500 CE). It operates on the basic idea of asceticism, which posits that the best way to interact with the Divine is by denying oneself physical goods related to basic bodily needs—in tandem with the extremely hierarchical religious structures of the medieval period.⁴ Thus, the practice combines a very old tradition with a relatively modern one: true asceticism mixed with complete devotion towards the Papal decree and fear of Purgatory.

In becoming an anchorite, one would directly limit any encounters with sin, metaphorically “locking in” purity before death. In many cases, anchorites received final rites before being enclosed; there is also evidence that some anchorites were chronologically buried on top of one another within a cell, with each anchorite sharing the same tomb (within the cell) as his or her predecessors.⁵ Interestingly, most takers for this practice were women who chose to sacrifice their physical freedom for spiritual freedom, as well as freedom from traditional gender roles; anchorites were often seen as sages and became advisors for their whole communities—a task rarely, if ever, assigned to women.

In addition to anchoritism, ascetics practiced eremitism, the practice of being a hermit, and the only other major form of asceticism practiced in medieval England. While on the surface, the two ways of life seem very similar, in

theory, they share a few significant differences. In practice, the distinction between anchorites and hermits is flexible, and many medieval wills refer to hermits and anchorites interchangeably. Among these differences, the most major is the ability, or inability, to move around.⁵ Whereas, generally, a hermit can move about from his dwelling (which he may share with other hermits), an anchorite is forbidden to ever leave his or her cell. Because of this distinction, the gender makeup of anchorites is starkly different from hermits. Anchorites were mostly female, with over half of the anchoritic population in England being female at any given time; hermits were almost exclusively male because women were seen as suspicious if they moved about alone with no means to support themselves and also had more reason because of this to choose a “stricter” vocation.⁷

Typically, anchoritic cells (also called anchorholds or reclusoria) were placed in highly visible locations, usually attached to the sides of parish churches; however, they varied widely in size and layout. Whereas some cells were scarcely big enough to fit a single person, others contained gardens and multiple rooms;⁸ unfortunately for scholars of London anchorites, nearly all churches in which there were originally anchorholds were burned in the Great Fire of 1666 or destroyed in the Blitz (1940–41) and not rebuilt with them, so it is nearly impossible—save for in the rare archaeological excavation—to see what they looked like in the city.

In order for an anchorite to become enclosed, he or she had to ask permission from the bishop under whose jurisdiction the cell would be located. Often, anchoritic petitions would have to prove the would-be anchorite’s ability to provide for him or herself, either through personal wealth or alms from wealthy members of the community. These petitions provide evidence that English anchorites truly came from all socioeconomic strata. Considered a highly desirable cause during the Middle Ages, many donors granted resources to anchorites, as anchorites would offer constant prayer for the donor, leading to an increase in the donor’s perceived holiness and decrease in time spent in Purgatory. Thus, donors from many socioeconomic strata left traces of themselves in the archives, as well. My work relies heavily on these sources as well as Rotha Mary Clay’s influential, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* written by Rotha Mary Clay.⁹ Despite being over a century old, no study has really added to or supplanted Clay’s work, which names the locations of anchorholds as well as their inhabitants across England. Clay’s data forms the basis for this study; all but one of the anchorites in London studied in detail in this paper, as well as the data for comparison, were compiled first by Clay. This essay analyzes the available data in a new way which both prizes the individuality of anchorites and looks through a regional lens.

Knowing all of this information, one major question naturally arises: why would an anchorite choose to live in a bustling town instead of a secluded area? Doesn’t living in an urban environment, where one would have more encounters with sinful activity, run counter to the goals of asceticism? This is especially true for the City of London, in which anchorites seem to have been located in the most visible of locations—mostly in parish churches or chambers along the length of the London Wall—but it is also true of many other anchoritic strongholds, especially in the Low Countries. According to Anneke Mulder-Bakker, anchorites chose to live in cities mainly as a consequence of economic growth; as women began to play bigger roles in commerce, they also began to claim bigger roles in choosing their spirituality.¹⁰ Thus, anchoritism, a relatively new phenomenon in the High Middle Ages, flowered in cities in tandem with the more “ascetic” countryside, in which convents, a more conventional route of devotion, were typically located. Furthermore, urban locations offered anchorites the opportunity to counsel more people—a duty sometimes required of the vocation. On London anchorites in particular, Claire Dowding of King’s College London persuasively argues that the location of anchorites along London’s Wall offered an “encircling ring of prayer” for the inhabitants of the city, leading to a sense of spiritual security.¹¹ Thus, despite urban locations offering less “peace” for solitaries, they made up for it in striking ways; this is why London offers a unique case study into anchoritic lives, being the center of English population and economic development throughout the later Middle Ages.

This investigation will be organized into two distinct sections, creating a prosopographical study of the anchorites of London. The first section will trace the anchorholds of the City of London and their inhabitants, if known, from the western edge of the city along the Wall to the eastern. This section will give individual treatment to anchorites and their locations, as well as give a sketch of the geography of anchoritism across time in London. The second section will draw this data up for comparison; trends in the socioeconomic status and gender of anchorites, as well as their geographic locations and time periods, will be analyzed. Through both of these parts, this study will grapple with the individuality and similarity of London’s anchorites, creating a nuanced picture of anchoritism in medieval England’s largest city.

ANCHORITES FROM WEST TO EAST

The maps above show all of the known anchorholds in and immediately around the City of London.¹² Of the seventeen locations shown above (indicated by pink points), twelve

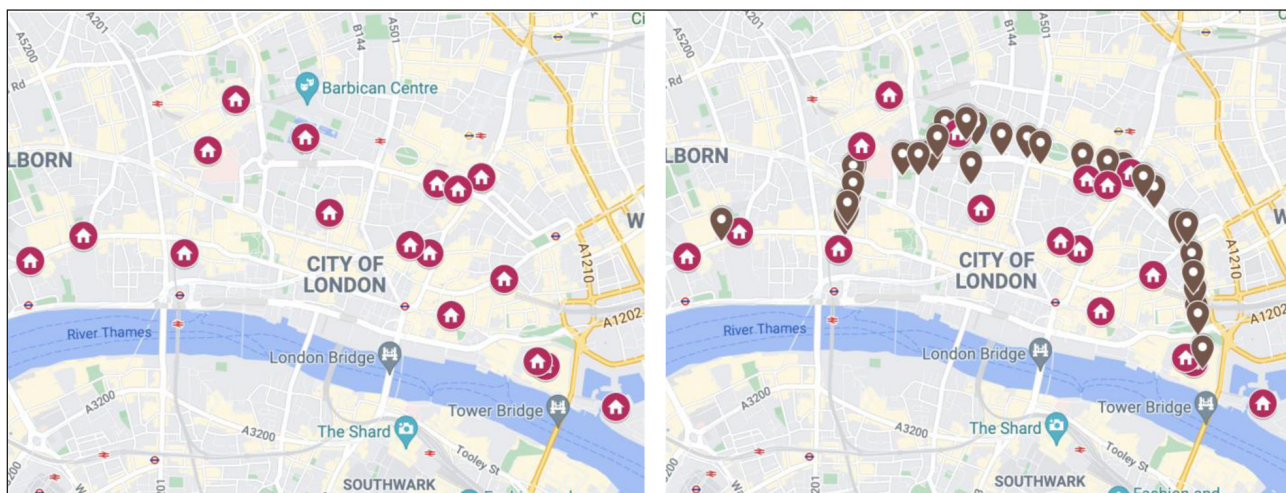


Figure 2 Anchorholds (pink) compared to remnants of the Roman and Medieval Walls (brown).

fall along the Roman and Medieval City Walls (indicated by brown points) and five fall in the interior of the City. It is certainly possible that more locations than those being studied in this paper were used as anchorholds; however, knowledge of these spaces and their inhabitants, if they existed, is greatly limited by the archive's scanty medieval documentation, and no more have been found in London since Clay's original study.¹³ In addition, more anchorholds exist just beyond the geographical reaches of the barriers used in this study. Future research is needed regarding the anchorites of all of historic Middlesex County (which includes Westminster, the City of London, and many suburbs) and may serve as a further line of research from this project.

ANCHORITES ALONG THE WALL

ST. CLEMENT DANES WITHOUT TEMPLE BAR

St. Clement Danes, which stands just outside the extended medieval boundaries of the City and now inside the bounds of Westminster, housed at least one anchorite throughout its history. By the year 1548, it served 1,400 communicants—a mid-sized number—and was wealthy compared to other London parish churches. A reoccurring theme in this study, St. Clement Danes benefitted from philanthropy and contained parish rooms that were let out to poor parishioners rent-free.¹⁴ The parish's rector, a Sir John Rixman, showing that the church had a connection to landed aristocrats who could support expensive spiritual and philanthropic endeavors.¹⁵ The anchorite, Dame Joan, withdrew to the anchorhold by 1426—somewhat late for London standards. Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter bequeathed twenty shillings to her in his will, and this indicates her being from the nobility.¹⁶ Significantly, she is one of only four recluses explicitly mentioned in the will of

an important Lancastrian who bequeathed money all over England. Considering the powerful connections the church had, as well as the fame and uniqueness of her patron, it is possible to speculate that Dame Joan is a singularly important spiritual figure with ties to aristocracy, although her family name is not known and likely never will be.

UNDER ST. DUNSTAN IN THE WEST

St. Dunstan in the West seems to have been one of the wealthiest churches housing an anchorite in medieval London; fittingly, it had a wealthy leader and jurisdiction to match. Out of a unique tradition, the king served as the parish's rector, and the Master of the Rolls, its warden: The Abbot of Westminster gave the church to Henry III in 1237. In turn, Henry III gave the church to the *Domus Conversorum*, or House of Converts—an institution that housed and provided for converted Jews. Under the rule of Edward I in 1290—fifty-three years later—all Jews were expelled from England; conversion became the only way for Jewish Londoners to stay in the City.¹⁷ Thus, St. Dunstan in the West took on an insidious role in London's rampant anti-Semitism, although it did not necessarily start with such intentions.

Also under the auspices of Henry III, St. Dunstan's gave an anchorite named Maud Malet an enclosure. The Calendar of Patent Rolls for July 7, 1267 states the following:

Whereas Maud Malet desires to serve God perpetually in a cell (recluserio) under the church of St. Dunstan, which church belongs to the House of Converts without London, the king, thinking it to be pious to accede to her wishes, commands...they shall assign to her there some fit place which she can build upon and inhabit, provided that she bears herself honourably.¹⁸

This entry is interesting for a variety of reasons. For one, the king himself is assigning the anchorite an enclosure instead of a bishop. For another, the anchorite seems to have explicitly chosen the House of Converts for her cell. Finally, the king seems to express some hesitation at her enclosure, perhaps expecting her to behave “dishonourably.” All of this information, combined with the fact that Malet is the name of a wealthy Norman family, likely proves that she was a pious noblewoman who wished to be enclosed at what seemed to be the most holy and useful place in London: a charity house for converts. And while there seems to be no noblewoman directly named Maud Malet, records show a noblewoman named Maud de Ferrers, daughter of the fifth Earl of Derby, who had been widowed by a Malet in 1259.¹⁹ Maud de Ferrers married again, however, and would have had to forsake her oath if she were the Maud Malet in question. While this is purely speculative and no records definitively prove this presumption, Maud de Ferrers could certainly have been the anchorite of St. Dunstan in the West—and another important, noble anchorite in the City.

PRIORY OF THE BLACKFRIARS

The Priory of the Blackfriars or Dominicans likely only housed one (non-monk) anchorite during its history, and it did so rather unwillingly. A Margery Elyote professed here in 1521; however, she had to prove to the Court of Alderman that she could provide for herself before being allowed to do so. The Prior of the Blackfriars made clear, in a fashion unlike the charity of the parish churches which housed anchorites, that Elyote could never “claim as of right any meat, drink or any other obligation whatsoever in the future from the said house.”²⁰ Clearly, the all-male Blackfriars were not in a position to support another soul, and they possibly did not want a female religious as part of their Priory. However, the monks relented after Aldermanic legal intervention, making Elyote one of the last anchorites to be enclosed in England.

BY ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S HOSPITAL

St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, founded to care for the sick poor of London in the twelfth century, offered yet another anchorhold for a well-to-do, thirteenth century Londoner. Katherine Hardel is its only known inhabitant, wife of William Hardel, Lord Mayor of London from 1215–1217. Her father, a Lord Mayor, makes her a stand-out among the non-landed London elite. In 1227, Henry III gave her a twenty-by-twenty foot plot of land outside the Hospital for an anchorhold in a display of her wealth and noble connections. Like several of the aforementioned anchorites, Hardel also seems to have taken her own initiative in selecting the place for her cell.

With this said, it is unclear if Katherine Hardel ever actually inhabited her anchorhold; her husband was still alive at the time of her grant. While it was not forbidden for someone to become a recluse while married—the non-reclusive spouse had to agree to it and this happened at least one other time near London—it was somewhat out of the ordinary. Another possibility is that she planned for widowhood and died before her husband, leaving her anchorhold empty; unfortunately, there is much more data on William Hardel than Katherine, making this query impossible to answer.²¹ Whatever the truth, Katherine Hardel is representative of the upper echelons of London anchoritism, planning her future on her own terms while living in the patriarchal present.

ST. MARY DE MANNY

St. Mary de Manny was a private chapel in the West Smithfield plague cemetery—a site rented from St. Bartholomew’s Hospital and developed by Sir Walter Manny, a wealthy French mercenary-turned-gentleman in 1348. There is very little evidence about the anchorite here; undoubtedly, she would be unknown if she were not by chance supported in the 1361 will of Hugh Peyntour (painter, perhaps both an occupation and surname).²² Although virtually nothing is known about her, it is clear that she was no longer present by 1371 when Manny gave the land for the building of a Carthusian monastery—often known as an eremitical order—on top of the graveyard, and that she likely would have found her vocation praying for the souls of plague victims buried nearby.²³ Despite her obscurity, she is an incredibly interesting and macabre case; no other anchorite in London lived in a private chapel or in a plague cemetery, and no other anchorite’s cell was later replaced by a monastery.

ST. GILES WITHOUT CRIPPLEGATE

Hugh Peyntour supported another unnamed anchorite at St. Giles Without Cripplegate in 1361; however, this is somewhat unsurprising because it was his home parish and the place in which he chose to be buried.²⁴ Although there is no information about the anchorite (other than the fact she was female), she would likely have been in some way involved with a French hospital of St. Giles that once stood adjacent to the church. Henry V (r.1413–1422) gave this property to a Brotherhood of Our Lady and St. Giles, which seems to have been reformed after a period of dissolution, for “relief of the poor.” In turn, many of the properties around the church seem to have been used as almshouses for the poor, although it is unclear if they were used in this way while the anchorite inhabited it.²⁵ Whatever the case, this parish predisposed itself towards charitable giving, and the anchorite must have played a role in support of the sick poor.

ALL HALLOWS LONDON WALL

All Hallows London Wall has been by far the most studied anchorhold location in London due to its extensive documentation in *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of All Hallows, London Wall* and its well-known anchoritic resident Simon Appulby. In her *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530–1558*, historian Mary C. Erler extensively describes the anchoritic presence in this small, relatively poor parish church, which traces its residents from 1402 until Appulby's death in 1537.²⁶ The first "known" anchorite—as Clare Dowding has claimed an anchorite may have lived here in the mid-fourteenth century—was a woman named Margaret Burre.²⁷ Significantly, she left a somewhat substantial will in which she gave clothing, domestic items, and alabaster devotional items to her daughter, her servant, and another woman who may have become the next anchorite of All Hallows.²⁸ Given that few anchorite wills exist—one of the others belonging to Appulby—it can be ascertained that the anchorites of this parish were likely more well-off than the other lay-inhabitants who seem to have mostly worked in the leather trade. After Burre, there begins a century-long succession of unnamed and named anchorites. All of the other named anchorites are male—William Lucas, priest, Robert Lynton, Giles, and Simon Appulby—which runs contrary to all of the anchorites treated thus far. In addition, there is greater evidence of bequests from upstanding members of society (the Bishop of London, former Mayors of London, the Duchess of Buckingham, etc.) than at other locations; however, this may just be due to the data, or lack thereof, available on other medieval parish churches. During the Dissolution, the parish seems to have gained some fame and greater support due to Appulby's inhabitation; Appulby authored a religious treatise styled *The Fruyte of Redempcyon*, a translation of Latin meditations on Christ which was published in five editions from 1514–1532. A translation in vernacular, the newly-Protestant public widely accepted it, despite its author's staunch Catholicism. Appulby was the last anchorite to live in London, and the anchorhold of All Hallows London Wall passed to the city swordbearer in 1538, a year after his death.²⁹ Through all of these occupants, this parish may have been the longest-inhabited anchorhold location in London and certainly had its share of important characters. Despite this, it is different in many ways from other anchorite-hosting parishes, a fact that will be discussed in detail further on.

IN THE WALL BESIDE BISHOPSGATE

Although not a church, the Roman Wall remained an important fixture in the lives of medieval Londoners, as it stood both as the literal boundary of the city and a reminder of the safety and power afforded by its residents. As such,

anchorites were welcome inhabitants who oftentimes were seen as surrounding London with a "ring of prayer," as well as liminal figures, existing in a holy realm neither in nor out of the City.³⁰ This particular spot in the wall seems to have housed at least three anchorites and at least four separate wills mention it. Chronologically, Hugh Peyntour (1361) was the first to give money to "the hermit near Bisshopsgate."³¹ Although he refers to this holyperson as a hermit and his other objects of donation as anchoresses, it is possible that this was just a male anchorite who inherited the name of the similar religious group that was more likely to be male. In any case, all of the other wills refer explicitly to recluses or anchorites, probably making this unnamed figure one as well. The next will that mentions this location belongs to John Daubriggecourt (1415), a knight who gave five shillings. to the Bishopsgate anchorite.³² The third will was for Thomas Beaufort (1426), Duke of Exeter, who also gave to Dame Joan of St. Clement Danes. He gave the same amount of money (20 s.) to this "mulieri recluse—female recluse" as to Dame Joan; however, he left this anchorite unnamed.³³ The final will that mentions an anchorite here belonged to Anne (1480), Duchess of Buckingham, and relative of the Beauforts. She gave six shillings. eight pennies. To the Anker in the Wall beside Bishops gate, London in order to pray in twenty masses for the souls before mentioned, and to say twenty diriges for them.³⁴ This particular will is interesting because it gives a purpose for the bequest. While it can be inferred that all other donations likely were in exchange for prayers, the fact that the Duchess of Buckingham specifically asks this anchorite to pray over the souls of her favored dead shows that he/she had something special to offer. Although unnamed, he/she obviously made an impact on the life of at least one important noble. As with the other anchorites of this location, the large donations were likely inspired by the fact that there was no supporting parish church and large independent sources of money were required. However, these anchorites may also have been seen as uniquely holy individuals deserving of support from the highest echelons of English society.

ST. BOTOLPH'S WITHOUT BISHOPSGATE

St. Botolph's Without Bishopsgate was a relatively poor parish church with a population of 650 communicants.³⁵ The anchorite who lived here, referred to as another (or perhaps, if she moved anchorholds, the same as at St. Clement Danes) Dame Joan by Rotha Clay, is unnamed in the extant will of John Redeford, glover, in 1370.³⁶ He gives money "to the aforesaid church, ministers, and lights therein, as also to the anchorite living there and to the fabric of the belfry."³⁷ By phrasing his will in this way, it seems as though Redeford responds to the anchorite as a physical part of the church, like fabric or lights. Thus, the

anchorite can gain yet another role in medieval London—a permanent and solid fixture of religious infrastructure. It is also likely that this anchorite would have played a role in hospital-related duties, as the Bethlam Royal Hospital (also known as Bedlam) was located in this parish from 1247.

NEAR THE TOWER OF LONDON

A location near the Tower of London seems to have been occupied by a Sir Robert in 1371. He is only mentioned in the will of Geoffrey Patrik, *scryveyn* (scrivener), and is called a “recluse monk,” perhaps having joined a monastery before his enclosure.³⁸ Because this spot would have been close to the seat of power in medieval London and because the anchorite was called “Sir,” this anchorite was likely another member of the landed aristocracy. However, because he is only mentioned in the will of a single member of the middle class and not of another aristocrat, it is likely that he did not play as big of a role in power politics as some other anchorites might have. However, it is interesting that Sir Robert is supported by a scrivener in his will, perhaps indicating a turnaround—in either direction—of some anchorites’ social status once enclosed.

ST. EUSTACE (BY ST. PETER’S CHAPEL INSIDE THE TOWER OF LONDON)

St. Eustace, a private chapel in the Tower, had at least three anchorites in its time, all of whom were directly supported and given enclosure by Henry III. As such, these anchorites, both male and female, must have either been favorites of the king or wielded some power to get there. The first was a Brother William who was enclosed in 1237;³⁹ next was Idonea de Boclaund in 1253;⁴⁰ and finally was a Geoffrey le Hermit, who petitioned for a renewal of alms (which was not granted) from Edward I in 1272.⁴¹ All three of these anchorites may have already been aristocrats at the time of their enclosures; however, Geoffrey’s request of alms suggest that he was wealthy enough to support himself without work. As for Idonea de Boclaund, it is possible that she was really Idonea de Leybourne, wife of Roger de Leybourne II and member of the Buckland aristocracy.⁴² However, the birthdates of both of these aristocrats are difficult to verify and may not correspond well to the 1253 enclosure date; Idonea would have been very young at the time of her enclosure and would have had to forsake her vows to marry Leybourne. Regardless, all three of these anchorites represent Henry III’s generosity towards the vocation and perhaps social elevation for select, “worthy” individuals.

“SWANNESNEST” BY THE TOWER AND NEAR ST. KATHARINE’S HOSPITAL

This location was host to perhaps only one anchorite in its history, Friar John Ingram, who lived here from at least

1371 to at least 1380. His name is mentioned twice (by Geoffrey Patrik (1371), scrivener;⁴³ and Cecilia Rose (1380), relict of clerk Thomas Rose⁴⁴), and he is unnamed in another will of 1380 by John Gille, draper.⁴⁵ The fact that he is named more than once speaks to his being a uniquely identifiable figure among the peasantry. In addition, anchorites rarely received funds from different wills within the same year, perhaps showing his important status. Like many of the other aforementioned male anchorites, “Friar” John Ingram was also a trained religious before his enclosure—something that does not seem to be the case for most female anchorites.

ANCHORITES IN THE INTERIOR

CEMETERY OF ST. LAWRENCE JEWRY

The Cemetery of St. Lawrence Jewry, a medium-sized church in the old Jewish quarter of London, hosted at least two anchorites—uniquely, at the same time. An unnamed anchorite (called hermit here and in all other documents except for Wykeham’s Register) lived here likely by himself in 1361⁴⁶ and was probably alone again by 1377.⁴⁷ However, two documents confirm the same two anchorites—Richard le Coupe de Swepestone, priest, and Geoffrey Richard, layman—as living together in 1370/1371.⁴⁸ While it was possible for anchorites to have companions, this case is particularly interesting because of their major differences. For one, they seem to have come from different classes (the former being likely an aristocrat), as well as from different religious backgrounds and educations (the former being a priest and the latter a layman). Furthermore, it is unclear in what way Geoffrey Richard was a companion (*socius ipsius*) to de Swepestone; perhaps he was just a servant, or perhaps more likely, they were both anchorites, either enclosed in the same cell or in adjoining cells. Interestingly, they both received alms at the same time from William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, perhaps indicating that their unique situation was known and even revered by the heads of the Church.⁴⁹ Whatever the truth of their circumstances, these anchorites both represent a strange position in the world of anchoritism and prove the worth of studying anchorites on an individual basis so that the “strange” is not overlooked.

ST. BENET FINK

The relatively wealthy parish church of St. Benet (Benedict) Fink housed at least one unnamed anchorite,⁵⁰ as she appears in the wills of John de Aylesham, mercer, in 1345⁵¹ and Hugh Peyntour in 1361.⁵² Although almost nothing is known about either the anchorite or the medieval incarnation of the church, it is very likely that both were involved with philanthropy in the form of St. Anthony’s

hospital (ca. 1254), which was located in the parish. Significantly, the hospital's patron saint was St. Anthony the Great of Egypt, often known as Anthony the Anchorite, perhaps predisposing the parish towards an anchoritic presence.

ST. PETER UPON CORNHILL

St. Peter Upon Cornhill was one of London's wealthiest parish churches, built upon the highest point in the City. It housed at least four anchorites, of which three were named and supported by either the King or the Bishop of London. The first named anchorite was Beatrice de Meaus (1307), who was given permission to be enclosed in the church by the Bishop of London "*in quo anacrita antea inhabitare solebant* – in which anchorites were accustomed to live before."⁵³ The enclosure was then inhabited from this point at least until 1348 but likely was inhabited continuously until at least 1449.⁵⁴ The next named anchorite, Christina Huchin, is not listed in Rotha Clay's work or any subsequent author. However, she is named as the predecessor of Emma Cheyne, the anchorite in 1449, by Henry VI, who gave both four pennies per day. Cheyne, interestingly, is the widow of the recluse of Bury St. Edmunds but only decided to become an anchorite after twenty-two years of widowhood; the two spouses must have separated so that the husband could accept his vocation as a solitary while married.⁵⁵ All three of these anchorites, being named women supported by wealthy and powerful men, likely were aristocrats to begin with—something not surprising for such an important medieval church.

ST. MARGARET PATTENS

St. Margaret Pattens was one of the poorest churches housing an anchorite in London. Perhaps in direct consequence, its anchorite seems to have been rather poor as well. Only one unnamed anchorite is known to have lived here, and she is only known because she had to be freed from debts by Henry III. The Calendar of the Close Rolls for 1236 states that the aforesaid anchorite owed twelve shillings to "*Sclune et Pyum, Judeis Lond'* – Sclune and Pyum, Jews of London," and that she should be freed from the debt as well as her pledge.⁵⁶ It is unclear how an anchorite would have gotten into debt with moneylenders, especially those who practiced "usury," which was seen as a sin and relegated to Jewish citizens. The fact that the king had to intercede on her behalf shows how revered anchorites in London, as well as how fallible they could be. One wonders if the reason why no later alms were given to the anchorite of St. Margaret Pattens was because she had to forsake her vows due to a lack of funds and because no one was willing to take her place in such a poor parish.

ALL SAINTS/ST. KATHARINE COLEMAN

St. Katherine Coleman had at least one anchorite in 1228. Little information is available on either the church or the anchorite, but he/she is mentioned as receiving two fur coats (*pelicia*) and one white vestment (*rochetto*) in the 1228 will of Richard de Elmham, canon of the church of St. Martin le Grand, London.⁵⁷ Strangely, all of the other anchorites in London only received one penny in his will. Perhaps this anchorite is his particular favorite, or perhaps he/she was just in need of warm clothes from a fellow religious. Regardless, the fact that de Elmham gave such specific clothing items to this anchorite perhaps shows that he had enough contact with him/her to have intimate knowledge of needs.

THEMES IN LONDON'S ANCHORITISM

THE ANCHORITES

The anchorites of London were, at the same time, individuals practicing uniquely personal spiritualities and heirs to larger themes in their vocation. To begin, most of the anchorites in London were female—of the discussed anchorites, sixteen were female, eleven were male, and two were of indeterminate gender—following a pattern seemingly present throughout England. According to Ann K. Warren, the gender makeup of anchorites did change significantly over time, but women always predominated; male anchorites seem to have only burst rapidly onto the scene in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with very few appearing before.⁵⁸ This also seems to echo the London data, as most of the male anchorites appear only in those centuries. As for the named female anchorites, several are referred to by their relationship to the men in their families (Katharine Hardel, wife of William Hardel; Emma Cheyne, widow of the recluse of Bury St. Edmunds). None of the male anchorites derive any status from their families and seem to have been expected to show virtue solely by themselves; female anchorites still needed to prove that they came from pious families before they were entrusted with enclosure. In addition, some female anchorites seem to have been treated with a degree of mistrust or patronization before their enclosures. For example, church officials gave Maud Malet enclosure with the stipulation "that she bears herself honourably," and Margery Elyote was barely given enclosure even after she proved herself wealthy enough not to burden the Blackfriars. No male anchorites were put under this level of surveillance by their benefactors. Thus, even though anchoritism largely offered an escape from gender norms to its female practitioners, it still functioned within the medieval patriarchy.

In terms of the anchorites themselves, one other major theme seems to appear—that of wealth and aristocratic status. Many unnamed anchorites, and almost all named anchorites, seem to have had ties to the English aristocracy or been acquainted with those who did; those who did not seem to have been met with derision or found themselves entangled in debts (Margery Elyote, anchorite of St. Margaret Patten). While wealth likely would have played a larger role in anchoritism than in other religious professions—an anchorite had to have enough money to support him/herself and did not have to give up his/her belongings like in a monastery or convent—it would also have likely been selected for by the documents available in the archive. Especially for the earliest anchorites, the only documents available are from the registers of the king. There easily could have been more anchorites in London who were not supported by or had anything to do with the royal family, but they do not appear in the archive. Instead, the only anchorites mentioned came from wealthy, Norman families that would have had ties to the monarchy. The same issue occurs later, as well, with the day-to-day interactions and almsgiving of non-aristocrats not being written down. Thus, while London anchorites seem to have come from the upper echelons of English society, it is possible that this is, to some degree, a misrepresentation of the true situation. Whatever the case, it is interesting that so many wealthy women wished to give up their status for a life of solitude.

THE TIMES

The anchorites of London also seem to exhibit some notable themes regarding the times in which they were enclosed. Anchoritism seems to have been continuous in London from the early thirteenth century (1227) until the Dissolution (1537). This challenges the commonly held idea that anchoritism only really occurred in rural areas until around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the balance turned in the favor of urban areas.⁵⁹ In fact, anchorites lived in London at a relatively consistent rate from the thirteenth century until the fifteenth century, with numbers peaking at the same rate in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Figure 3). Only two anchorites

Century of Inhabitation	Number of Anchorites
Thirteenth century	7
Fourteenth century	10
Fifteenth century	10
Sixteenth century	2

Figure 3 Timeline of London's Anchorites.

were enclosed in the sixteenth century when feelings of resentment towards non-Protestant solitaries caused enclosures to wane across England. Overall, this pattern shows that anchorites and their patrons viewed London as a valid place of enclosure throughout the late Middle Ages, perhaps in such a strong manner that the only force worthy of changing it was the Reformation.

With this said, a few times within the centuries seem to have been given special relevance. Henry III (1216–1272) seemed to have been a staunch supporter of anchoritism, as well as many other religious causes and charities, and aided all of the known London anchorites present in the thirteenth century. His son, Edward I (Edward Longshanks, 1272–1307) seems to have some level of disdain for anchorites, and he stopped funding those whom his father had supported, notably in the Tower. The next real jump in anchoritic support seems to have occurred around the time of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century. However, there were a few key almsgivers, such as Hugh Peyntour (1361) and Geoffrey Patrik (1371), who donated small amounts of money to many anchorites. Therefore, while anchoritism likely enjoyed a surge in necessity during such a catastrophic moment as the Plague, it is possible that the numbers may have been skewed by the archival prominence of a few individuals. Again, it is impossible to know the truth of the matter with the sources available, but the information certainly points to the rising importance of anchorites during prolonged societal struggles. Furthermore, it also proves that anchoritism held a precarious position; a single king, if he were so disposed, could largely stop the tradition in London for decades to come.

THE LOCATIONS

Finally, several themes in the locations anchorites picked or were given for their enclosure emerge. As shown in the map of London's anchorites (Figures 1 and 2), many were positioned in churches along the Wall, if not in the Wall itself. This directly supports the idea first put forward by Clare Dowding that anchorites formed a “ring of prayer” around the City, constantly providing its citizens with spiritual protection as well as physical. Furthermore, it proves that anchorites were seen as a boon for the City throughout their existence in London; hardly would they have been trusted with such an important infrastructural piece as the Wall, especially throughout the period of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) and other Anglo-French conflicts, if they did not signify holiness, security, and God's will.

In addition to being placed along the Wall, several clusters of anchorholds seem to have appeared. There were three anchorholds within the immediate vicinity of

the Tower, as well as three around Bishopsgate, and three around the area of Smithfield just north of the City. While these clusters could have been coincidental, it is more likely that they were formed deliberately. As for the Tower, it would have been beneficial for London's seat of power to have an extra anchoritic presence if the aforementioned statement on spiritual protection held true. As for the cluster around Bishopsgate, it not only had a hospital, but also a well-used gateway through the Wall in its midst. The Smithfield cluster also had ties to two hospitals, as well as Walter Manny's plague cemetery. Thus, all three clusters had unifying relationships to outside bodies, whether it be the Tower or hospitals, which made them uniquely predisposed towards working together. The more anchoritic presence in an area, the more importance it seemed to have.

Following on this trend, nearly all of the anchorholds were located in parishes associated with great philanthropy. Much of this philanthropy, although not all, was related to the upkeep of hospitals;⁶⁰ six of the anchorholds, including St. Mary de Manny, were directly associated with hospitals. Adding this fact to the large presence of anchorites during plague years proves that anchorites played a large role in praying for the sick, especially the sick poor. Since this point has not yet been made in any scholarship regarding English anchorites, it should be studied in greater depth in the future.

Lastly, anchorites seem to have appeared only in larger, middle to wealthy parishes; even the smallest and poorest parishes that supported London's anchorites were decidedly not the smallest and poorest in London.⁶¹ In addition, many of the locations that supported anchorites were patronized directly by aristocrats. All of the hospitals had royal patrons, as well as many of the anchoritic parish churches and all of the great infrastructural pieces like the Wall or the Tower. If an anchorite chose a poor location, such as St. Margaret Pattens, his/her time seems to have been limited. Therefore, anchorites may have really only come into contact with the exceptionally wealthy and the exceptionally poor, perhaps having little to do with the middle classes. Of course, as with many of the aforementioned themes, there is no direct information that proves this point, and it deserves wider treatment in subsequent research.

In conclusion, it is possible to know much more about individual London anchorites than most historians have acknowledged. In addition, it is possible to discern themes—not present in other English locations—that connect them. When one looks closely at the uniqueness of London's anchorites, with their special position of power—both spiritual and political—it becomes clear that the City has been privy to a vibrant and somewhat unconventional history and stock of holy persons. This is especially the case in regard to anchorites, whose form of religiosity prizes the

individual and his/her personal relationship to the Divine. Truly, studying anchorites in a prosopographic manner can offer historians the greatest possibility to gain a glimpse into the personal lives of these men and women who gave prayers, hope, and comfort to an inordinate number of London's citizens—and perhaps to finally offer them a regeneration of the validation and reverence they once received.

NOTES

- 1 Megan J. Hall, "Late medieval anchorhold at All Saints Church, King's Lynn, Norfolk, England," from <https://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/tag/anchorhold/>.
- 2 Anchorites have been studied in greater detail in mainland Europe (see the works of Anneke Mulder-Bakker) than in the United Kingdom. Rotha Mary Clay's 1914 book on English anchorites still remains the cornerstone piece of literature for the field, despite being over a century old; all subsequent studies on anchorites (especially Ann K. Warren's 1985 *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*) rely heavily on her work. Many of the gaps in the field identified by Warren in the 1980s have yet to be filled today; this project works to fill some of these gaps, especially in terms of giving extended focus to regionalism in anchoritism.
- 3 For more in-depth background on these structures see the introduction of E.A. Jones' compendium of anchoritic sources, *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200–1550*.
- 4 Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pgs. 7–8.
- 5 E. A. Jones and Rosemary Horrox, eds, "29. The anchorite's cell at Lewes" and "30. Memorial before the tomb, from Walter's Rule" in *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200–1550*, Manchester University Press, 2019, pgs. 110–111. The first document contains plans from an anchorhold in which an anchorite was buried; other empty graves were found nearby. The second document from an anchoritic rulebook describes the effect a grave within an anchorhold should have upon the anchorite.
- 6 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pg. 8.
- 7 E. A. Jones and Rosemary Horrox, eds, *Hermits and Anchorites*, pg. 21. This piece of Jones' introduction details the lack of female hermits in England.
- 8 Jones and Horrox, eds, *Hermits and Anchorites*, pgs. 58–59. Whole chapter contains great primary sources on the difficulties of pinpointing anchorholds, but this section gives Jones' summary on the variability of anchorholds.
- 9 Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, The Antiquary's Books, London: Methuen, 1914, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006574975>.
- 10 Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, The Middle Ages Series, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pgs. 10, 12.
- 11 Clare M. Dowding, "A Certain Tourelle on London Wall ... Was Granted ... for Him to Inhabit the Same": London Anchorites and the City Wall," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 42, no. 1 (2016): 47, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jmedrelcult.42.1.0044>.
- 12 All of the anchorites identified in this paper, except for Christina Huchin, were first identified by Clay. Whereas Clay provided names and scant details for the anchorites, this study will put these details in conversation with one another. Thus, this study uses archival resources from many different locations, including the Husting Rolls and rolls issued by the monarchy. In addition, this study uses the Chantry Certificates of 1548 to determine parish wealth—something not done by any previous study on anchorites.
- 13 The task of finding more anchorites than those listed by Clay is notably being undertaken by E.A. Jones, who has created a crowd-

- sourcing website for the British Academy-funded project <http://hermits.ex.ac.uk/index/anchorites>. This project plans to supercede the work of Clay, but has seemingly been put on hold since 2010.
- 14 This study assumes that parish wealth stayed relatively consistent over the period in question. While there was certainly some change that occurred in parish wealth during this period, it is very hard to study; the best data happen to be from the London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate of 1548, which was created under Henry VIII's orders and after the deaths of all London anchorites, to establish the wealth and size of England's churches during the Dissolution. So far as this author knows, the Chantry Certificate has never been used in a study regarding English anchorites.
 - 15 "Chantry Certificate, 1548: Middlesex," in *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548*, ed. C J Kitching (London: London Record Society, 1980), 60–81, *British History Online*, accessed November 7, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol16/pp60-81>. The records here can be found in the National Archives, Reference: E 301.
 - 16 John Nichols and Richard Gough, *A collection of all the wills, now known to be extant, of the kings and queens of England, princes and princesses of Wales, and every branch of the blood royal, from the reign of William the Conqueror, to that of Henry the Seventh*, 1780, London: J. Nichols, pg. 250. Found in Register Chichele pars prima, fol. 397. a.b. 398. a.b. 399. a. in the archepiscopal registry at Lambeth.
 - 17 George Godwin, *The Churches of London: A History and Description of the Ecclesiastical Edifices of the Metropolis*, C. Tilt [and others], 1839, "St. Dunstan in the West," pg. 4.
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 - 20 E. A. Jones and Rosemary Horrox, eds, "6b. Margery Elyote" in *Hermits and Anchorites*, pgs. 53–54. "...modernised from the English in 'Repertories of the Aldermen of the City of London, Repertory 5': London Metropolitan Archives COL/CA/01/01/005, fol. 228r"
 - 21 E. A. Jones and Rosemary Horrox, eds, "7. A site for an anchorhold in Smithfield" in *Hermits and Anchorites*, pgs. 61–62. "Translated from the Latin entry in *Rotuli litterarum clausarum in Turri londinensi asservati*, edited by T.D. Hardy (2 vols, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1833, 1844), Vol. 2, p. 181."
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 - 26 Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530–1558*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, Accessed November 12, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central, pgs. 14–37. See also pgs. 144–147 for a detailed timeline.
 - 27 Clare M. Dowding, "A Certain Tourelle," pg. 52, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jmedirelicult.42.1.0044>.
 - 28 Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing*, pg. 144. See London Metropolitan Archives: DL/AL/C/002/MS09051/001, f. 97v.
 - 29 Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing*, pg. 146.
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 - 36 Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, pg. 230.
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 - 45 *Calendar of Wills: Part 2, 1358–1688*, Edited by R. R. Sharpe, pg. 218.
 - 46 *Calendar of Wills: Part 2, 1358–1688*, Edited by R. R. Sharpe, pg. 107.
 - 47 *Calendar of Wills: Part 2, 1358–1688*, Edited by R. R. Sharpe, pg. 197.
 - 48 *Calendar of Wills: Part 2, 1358–1688*, Edited by R. R. Sharpe, pg. 147. Winchester, Eng (Diocese) Bishop, and Thomas Frederick Kirby, *Wykeham's Register*, London: Simpkin & Co. limited; (etc., etc.), 1896, <http://archive.org/details/wykehamsregistre00kirbgoog>, pgs. 122–123, 42b.
 - 49 Winchester, Eng (Diocese) Bishop, and Thomas Frederick Kirby, *Wykeham's Register*, pg. 123, 42b.
 - 50 It is possible that these wills are refering to different anchorites who lived in St. Benet Fink at different times as neither give names.
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58 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pg. 20.

59 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pg. 37.

60 For more information on philanthropy before and during the Reformation see Susan Brigden's "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London."

61 For figures on the smallest and poorest parishes in London, see the Chantry Certificate, 1548: City of London. Particularly look at St. Mary Axe, St. Mary Staining, or St. Gregory.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Riggs, Carson. “*Pro anacorita* —Identifying Individuality in London’s Anchorites, 1200–1550.” *The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (2023): pp. 14–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/vtuhr.v12i1.186>

Published: 17 April 2023

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