



WHERE DID THE GREAT FIRE BEGIN?

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Every book on the Great Fire of London of 1666 states correctly that it began in Pudding Lane in Thomas Farriner's bakehouse, but they are usually vague or uninformative about exactly where in Pudding Lane Farriner's bakehouse was situated. Until about 1750 the site was easily identified by a stone inscription on the house built there after the Fire, and indeed it attracted sightseers. Edward Hatton in 1708 referred to the stone and stated that the house it was attached to was on the east side of the street (Hatton 1708, 56). However, the stone was removed before street numbers were introduced, so it was hard for later writers to identify the site exactly. Possibly the first to attempt to do so was Peter Cunningham, who observed in 1850 that there had formerly been an inscription on the front of the house '(No. 25, I believe)', and No. 25 was given more confidently as the site by some subsequent writers, who seem to have followed Cunningham (1850, 412).¹ In 1876 the stone inscription was found under the paving of the backyard of No. 25, face down (see below). The building on the north-east corner of Pudding Lane and Monument Street, which occupies part of the site of No. 25, is named Faryners House, and bears a plaque placed there by the Bakers' Company in 1986 stating, with admirable caution, that the Great Fire broke out 'near this site'. In fact documents generated by the City Corporation make it possible to determine the exact site, which was not No. 25.

In 1679 the committee which managed the City's lands ordered a view or survey of the site where the Fire began, which had become City property since 1666.² The viewers noted that the site was empty, and

that when a lease of it had been requested in 1674 nothing was done because 'there was a supposicon that it ought perpetually to ly wast'. They pointed out that in fact neither the Act of Parliament for rebuilding the City nor any order of the Court of Aldermen forbade rebuilding, though the possibility of leaving the site vacant had been discussed at the time the building of the Monument was agreed to. Their report was accompanied by a plan by John Oliver, the City's surveyor, on which the plot is described as 'Mr Fariners gronde there the Fyer began' (Fig 1).³ On Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676 there is one empty site on the east side of Pudding Lane, and it corresponds in shape to the plot on Oliver's plan (Fig 2). The same site can be identified on later maps, some of which show it in more detail, and some of these give street numbers. On Horwood's map of 1814 and the ward map of 1855 it is 23 Pudding Lane,⁴ so it was No. 23 rather than No. 25 where Farriner's bakehouse stood and where the Fire began.

No. 23 abutted north on a largely rectangular block of property consisting of Nos 24, 25 and 26, which from 1510 or thereabouts to at least 1789 belonged to the Fishmongers' Company rather than the City. It was let on a building lease to Daniel Harris, citizen and cooper, in 1667, which is why 'Mr Harrice' is given as the holder of the property to the north on Fig 1.⁵ Moreover, while Nos 24 and 26 faced Pudding Lane, No. 25 was at the back of the site (at least until 1855), so the stone inscription could not have been on No. 25.⁶ On the other side of No. 23, at what became No. 22, 'Mr Taynton' was Robert Taynton, citizen and glazier, who referred in his will of 1679 to his house on the east



Fig 1. John Oliver's plan of 1679 showing the plot where the Great Fire began (north is to the left) (London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, COL/CC/CLC/04/01, no. 208) (not to scale)

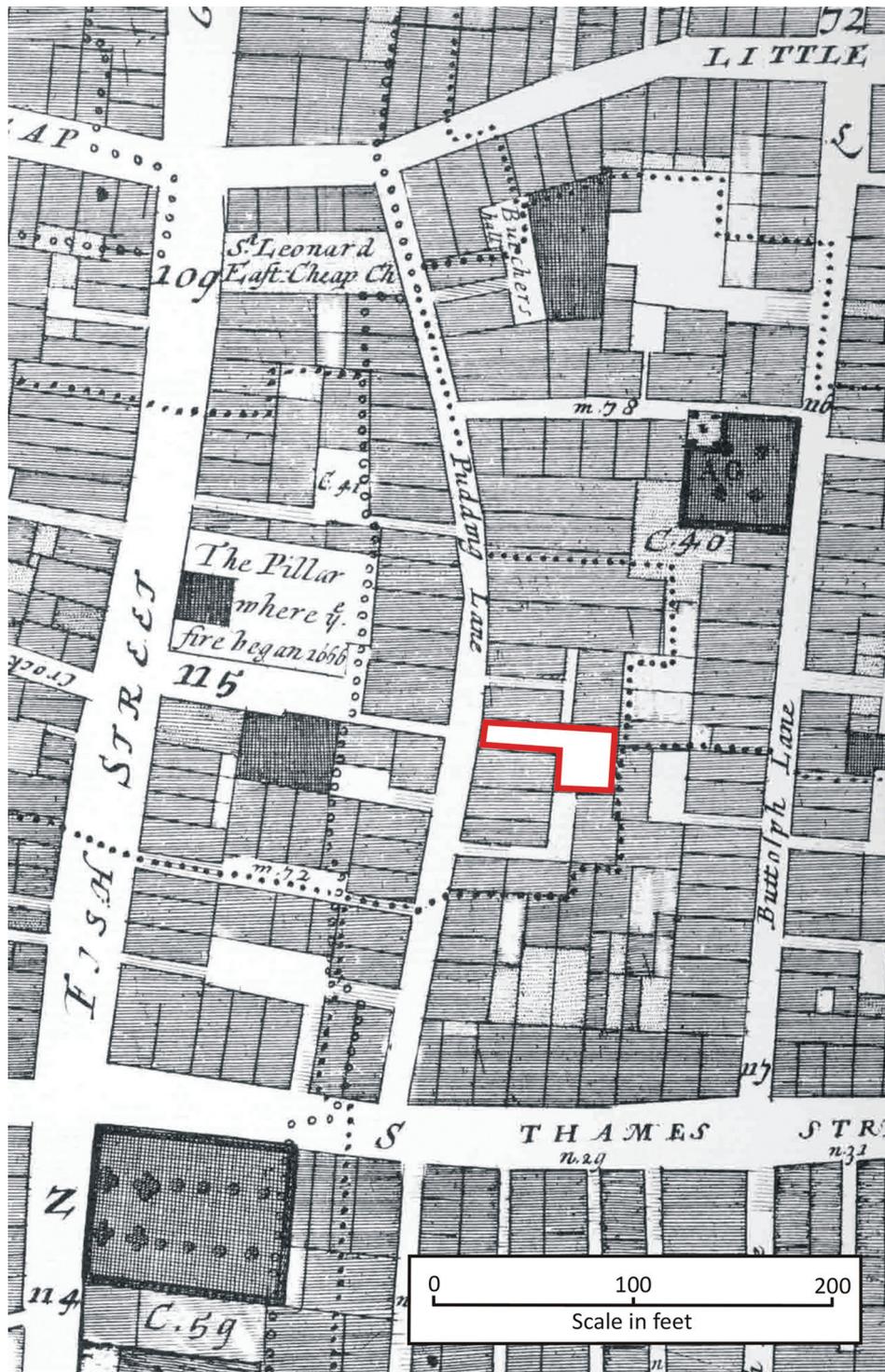


Fig 2. Detail from Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676 showing Pudding Lane, with a vacant site (outlined in red) on the east side opposite the passage from Monument Yard to Pudding Lane (north is at the top)

side of Pudding Lane occupied by Henry Freeman, which 'lyes next to the place where the late dreadful Fire which happened in London in 1666 began'.⁷ It was Freeman's request to enclose the site of No. 23 with a brick wall and build vaults there which caused the property to be viewed in 1679.

Comparison between the Ordnance Survey map of 1873 and modern maps indicates that No. 23 was where Monument Street now meets Pudding Lane, but it is possible to identify the site more precisely. Monument Street was created in 1886–7, connecting Monument Yard and Billingsgate. Several options for its course were put forward, and on 6 April 1886 a proposal for a slightly curving street was agreed. The plan drawn then shows No. 23, still with the shape it had in 1679, in relation to the planned new street. A subsequent plan, entitled 'Study plan for lotting vacant land', adds the proposed pavements and building plots (Fig 3).⁸ Farriner's house and bakehouse were therefore almost entirely on the site of the roadway where Monument Street meets the east side of Pudding Lane.

There are several clues to the layout of No. 23 in 1666. The plan of 1679 indicates where windows looked into the vacant site, and where a door opened into it (Fig 1). The viewers believed these were on sufferance (*ie* tolerated but lacking any legal right), 'except those into the break there (which was the bakers yard where he laid his bavins)'.⁹ The role of those bavins, or bundles of brushwood, in enabling the Fire to take hold is probably why they were specifically referred to. One of the reasons for believing Robert Hubert's confession that he had started the Fire (though he clearly had nothing to do with it) was that when he was taken to Pudding Lane he not only identified the site of Farriner's property but described it, including 'the shape of the little yard' (Clarendon 1827, 95). In City land leases a 'break' was a part of a boundary at right angles or thereabouts to the rest of that boundary, such as a short east–west stretch in the middle of a longer north–south boundary.¹⁰ There were three breaks in Farriner's boundaries, but two of them had no windows looking into them,

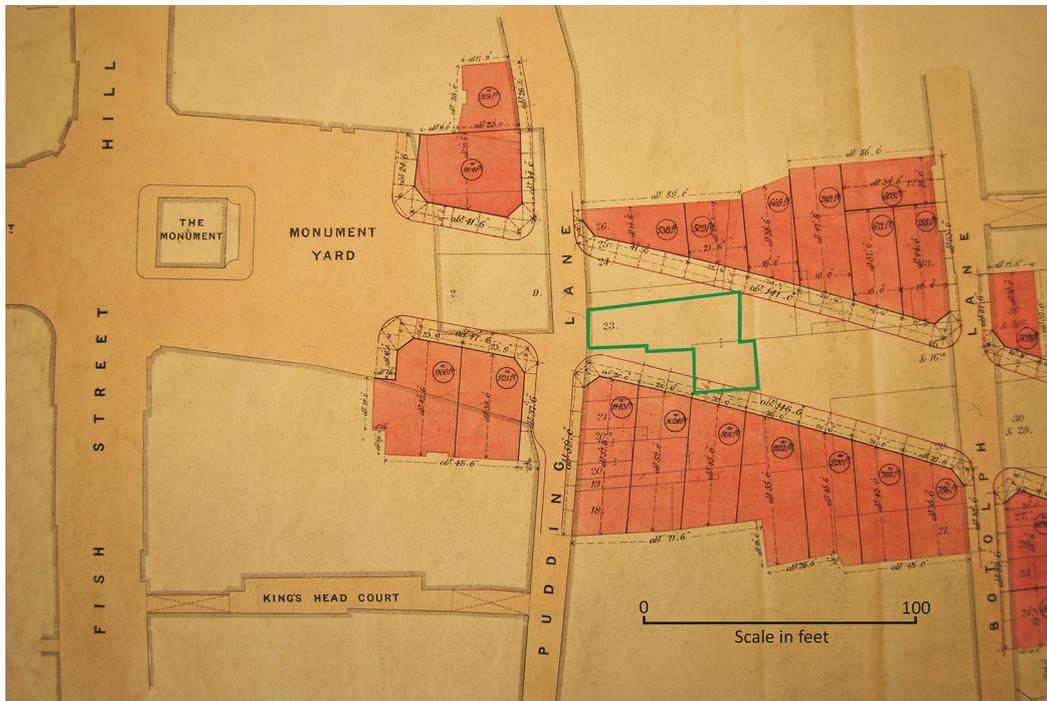


Fig 3. The agreed line of Monument Street in 1886, with the proposed pavements and building lots, showing the location of 23 Pudding Lane (outlined in green) (north is at the top) (London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, COL/TSD/PL/01/1985)

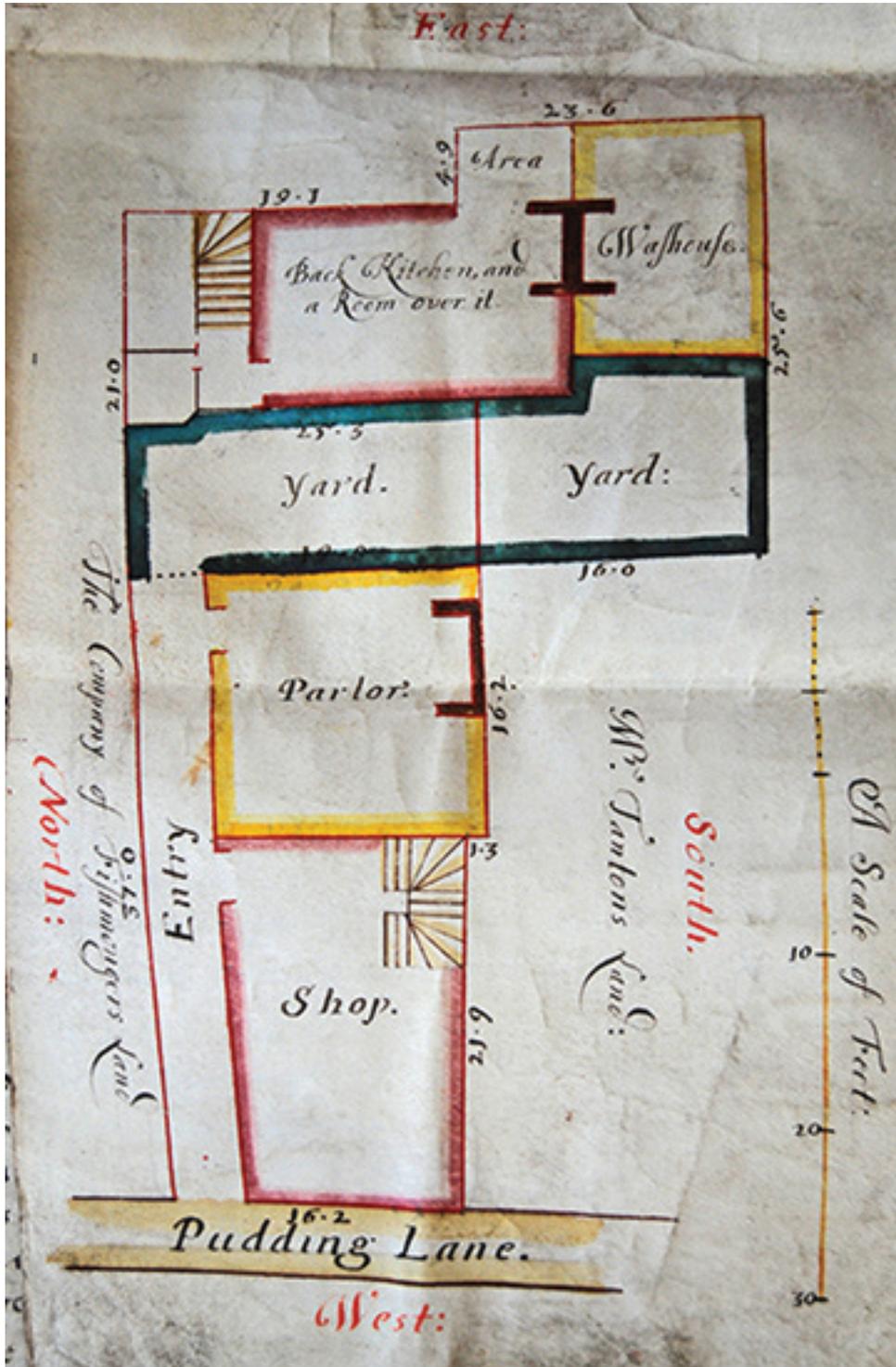


Fig 4. Plan of the house built in 1680 on the site of Farriner's house, drawn by William Leybourn, from the lease of 1682 (north is to the left) (reproduced by permission of the Comptroller and City Solicitor, City of London, COL/CCS/RM16/041/15)

so the break mentioned must have been the north–south part of Farriner’s boundary behind No. 22, and the yard was therefore east of that boundary. When a house was eventually built on the site it had a kitchen and a wash house at the back of the property, with a small yard the full width of the site between those buildings and the house facing Pudding Lane (Fig 4), at least in part coinciding with Farriner’s yard, though Farriner’s yard did not necessarily extend to the opposite edge of the property.

The inscriptions on the Monument provide a further clue. One of them states that the Fire broke out 202 feet (61.6m) to the east, corresponding to the height of the column. The preciseness of the measurement indicates that the distance had been accurately measured and that the measurers thought they knew exactly where the Fire started, presumably in and around Farriner’s oven. A distance of 202 feet takes us either to almost the back of the main part of No. 23 or to approximately the middle of the block of land behind No. 22.¹¹ This indicates that the bakehouse and oven were at the back of the site and suggests that they were at the back of the land behind No. 22, where Fig 4 shows the wash house, next to the yard where Farriner stored his bavins. If this was so, it is of course necessary to account for the spread of the fire to the house, which might have been via buildings on the north side of Farriner’s yard, or via the bavins.

In April 1680 the City Lands Committee let the site to Daniel Harris, who had previously rebuilt Nos 24–26, noting that it was where the Fire began. By November Harris had built there a house of four and a half storeys, which is recorded on plans of 1682 and 1719 (Fig 4).¹² Harris agreed to fix a stone at the front commemorating the Fire, with wording to be determined by Robert Hooke. The Committee subsequently added that the stone should refer to ‘ye papists firing this City’,¹³ and the stone erected in 1680–1 did indeed state (among other things) that ‘Here ... Hell broke loose upon this Protestant city, from the malicious hearts of barbarous papists’.¹⁴ The stone is said to have been removed temporarily in the reign of the Catholic James II and then finally in about 1750 ‘on account of the stoppage of passengers to read it’, or as the Dodsleys

put it in 1761, ‘the inhabitants being incommoded by the many people who came to look at the house, and read this board, it was taken down a few years ago’.¹⁵ Evidently it found its way to No. 25, being rediscovered when No. 25 was demolished in 1876.¹⁶ It is now in the Museum of London.

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NOTES

¹ *Eg.* Thornbury [1873], 572 (refers to Cunningham); and Hare 1894, 317.

² Neither Farriner nor Pudding Lane are mentioned in the City rentals of 1665 and 1666 (London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) COL/CHD/CT/01/012). Thomas Farriner (possibly Farriner junior) appears in a hearth tax list of about 1670, two doors away from where the Fire began (LMA, COL/CHD/LA/03/025/009/029, p 13). For Farriner’s biography, see Porter 2004.

³ LMA, COL/CC/CLC/04/01, no. 208.

⁴ The 1855 map is LMA, COL/WD/03/009.

⁵ *City of London Livery Companies Commission* 1884, 214, 262; Guildhall Library (GL) MS 6946, especially nos 619, 628, 632; GL, MS 21536, fol 11.

⁶ LMA, COL/WD/03/009.

⁷ The National Archives (TNA) PROB 11/361/287. See also TNA, C 6/412/63.

⁸ LMA, COL/TSD/PL/01/1972 (agreed proposal of 6 April 1886), 1983–4 (rejected options), 1985 (agreed proposal with building lots – Fig 3); Welch 1896, 392–3.

⁹ LMA, COL/CC/CLC/04/01, no. 208.

¹⁰ See *eg* LMA, CLA/008/EM/02/02/011, fols 2r, 4r, 5v–6r, 8r, 8v *etc.*

¹¹ This assumes that the measurement was from the centre of the Monument. If it was from the side nearest Pudding Lane, the only part of No. 23 within range would be the back part of the land behind No. 22.

¹² LMA, CLA/008/EM/03/019, fol 33. For the latter, see Gerhold 2016.

¹³ LMA, COL/CC/CLC/03/005, pp 12, 71, 90, 92.

¹⁴ The stone itself (object no. 7211) can be seen at <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/119401.html>.

¹⁵ Cunningham 1850, 412; Maitland 1756, 793 (‘This inscription has been taken away some years.’); Dodsley & Dodsley 1761, 233.

¹⁶ Information from Meriel Jeater, Museum of London (from *City Press*, 26 August 1876, p 2). Cunningham (1850) refers to the stone being preserved in a cellar in Pudding Lane.



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