



3. The Evolution of Chancery Lane

The maps from 1676 and 1740 clearly show that the street frontages from Fleet Street to Holborn were becoming increasingly urban in character, the large gardens were being replaced by tenement houses, shops and taverns. The area was still dominated by Inns of Chancery, Barnard's Inn, Staple Inn, Clement's Inn, Clifford's Inn and Furnival's Inn to name but a few, but these were situated behind the more densely grouped housing blocks. By 1815 Lincoln's Inn had expanded to include New Square and Stone Buildings and by 1873 more dramatic changes had started to occur as larger buildings began to appear on the street frontage. A large area of housing had been demolished between Carey Street and The Strand to make way for the Royal Courts of Justice and The Great Seal Patent Office which was built between Southampton Buildings and Tooks Court. Two other new buildings that were to have a powerful effect on Chancery Lane were also built during this period, The Law Society with its portico façade and the Public Records Office.

The Public Records Office was constructed between 1851 and 1882, built in a non-ecclesiastical gothic style (the next significant gothic revival building created after the Houses of Parliament). The last phases of its development which were to front onto Chancery Lane, required the demolition of Rolls House and the 13th century Rolls Chapel, although some remnants of the Chapel were retained and remain on site today.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw more of the Inns, so characteristic of the area, demolished; those that disappeared included Serjeant's Inn and Clement's Inn. Clifford's Inn was also removed; the only part of the old Inn in existence today is Clifford's Inn Passage which leads from Fleet Street to the former gate house. Offices and flats now situated on the original site are however known as Clifford's Inn. A large building or Bank Chambers appeared between Southampton Buildings and Staple Inn on what is now the site of a large modern building owned by Land Securities.

During this period other small changes occurred to the street pattern and Bream's Buildings, which had been a courtyard accessed via Chancery Lane and Rolls Passage, was formed into a new east-west route that linked through to Fetter Lane.



Francis Frith Collection

Old Bell Yard c1890



Guildhall Library, City of London

Old Tooks Court 1929



Guildhall Library, City of London

Old Staple Inn, c 1810



Guildhall Library, City of London

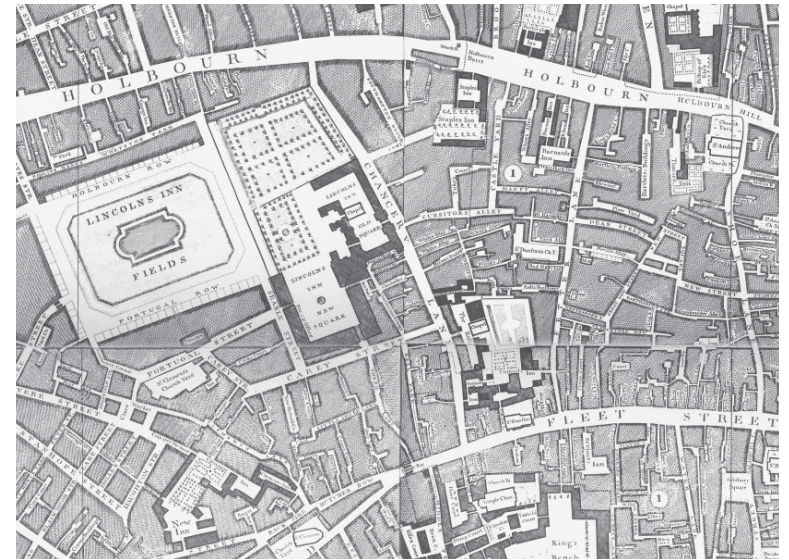
The Original Silver Vaults

Apart from the association with the many Inns of Chancery and later the Inns of Court there were several famous residents known to have lived in and have been associated with the area, for example Ralph Neville (1364-1425), Bishop of Chichester and Chancellor of England; Cardinal Wolsey (1473 - 1530), who would travel through the area with cushions filled with orange and vinegar to ward off the smell of the streets; Sir Thomas Wentworth (1539-1641), Earl of Strafford; and Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is also known to have lived nearby for a while and been greatly inspired by the area for at least two of his famous novels, Bleak House where he attacked the legal system and The Old Curiosity Shop. Leonard and Virginia Woolf were also known to have lived in Clifford's Inn between 1912 to 1913.



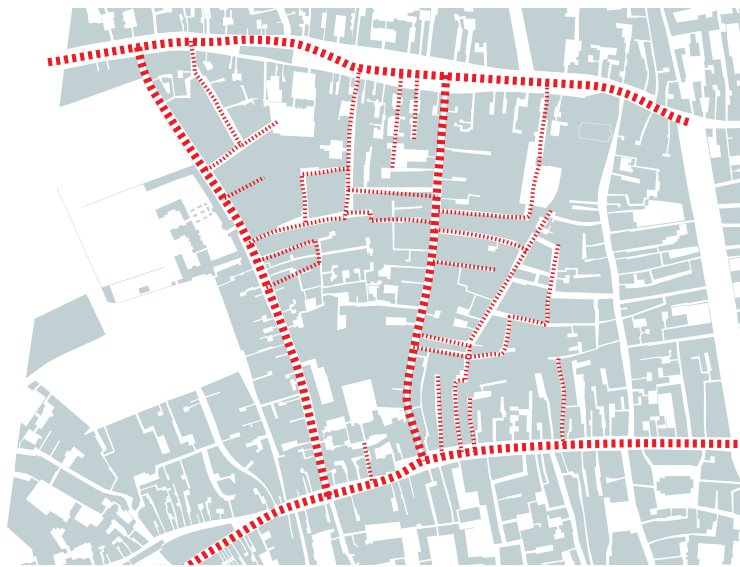
Ogilby and Morgan 1676

A to Z of Restoration London.
London Topographical Society (1992)

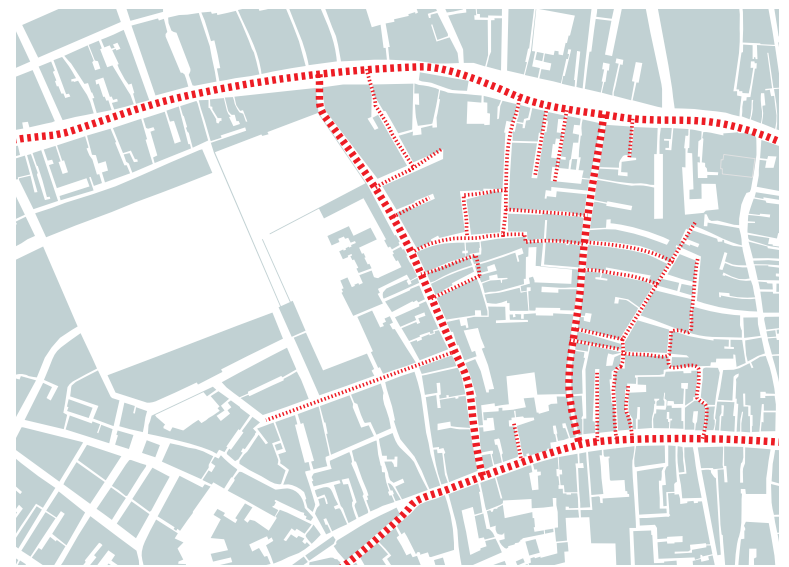


Regency London 1740

A to Z of Georgian London.
Harry Margary, Lyme Castle, Kent (1981)



Today's road layout overlaying the 1676 map



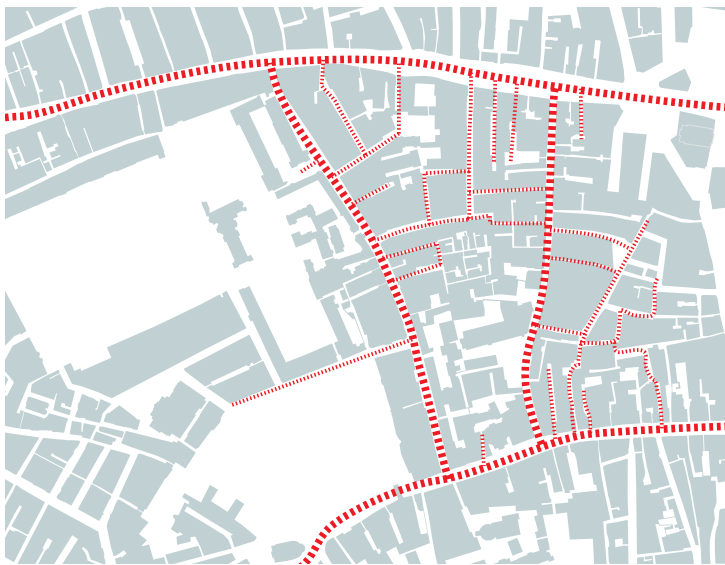
Today's road layout overlaying the 1740 map



1873 Ordnance Survey



1915 Ordnance Survey



Today's road layout overlaying the 1873 OS plan



Today's road layout overlaying the 1915 OS plan