sorts of visitation are clearly distinguishable: that known later as the common pleas eyre, with an extensive jurisdiction; and one with a more limited jurisdiction, confined to taking assizes and trying indictments (in effect, gaol delivery) and last used for a country-wide visitation in 1225-1226. But between the late 1160s (when a country-wide system of royal prisons was established) and the 1230s, it is clear that gaols were being delivered of their prisoners outside the occasion of these visitations; and it is uncertain to what extent letters patent were needed for the delivery of a gaol. It is only after the end of the visitations with limited jurisdiction, from 1227 onwards, that Gaol Delivery Commissions are found noted on the dorse of the Patent (and, occasionally, the Close) Rolls. For two decades thereafter, some county gaols were clearly being delivered without a recorded patent. But by 1246, when the first recorded Commission issued for a Guildford Gaol Delivery, at least one commission had issued under Henry III for all the county, and some of the minor, gaols; and for most of these with some frequency.

The Gaol Delivery Commission would therefore seem to have been framed in, or not long before, the 1220s. It has all the economy of language of that age. Except for the main or operative clause, 'ad gaolam .... deliberandam', its basic clauses continued thenceforward unchanged. The original operative clause was 'ad gaolam nostram de N deliberandam', (variant 'ad gaolam N deliberandam'). Between 1272 and 1342 there were many fluctuations in this form, owing to the issue of Commissions with jurisdictions overlapping gaol delivery; these included some of the special oyer and terminer commissions to deal with a particular trespass, but were mainly the commissions for trailbaston (of general oyer and terminer), for keepers of the peace, or for the trial of rebels. In 1342 the operative clause, which at times during the preceding seventy years had reverted to something close to its original form, became virtually standardized in the phrase 'ad gaolam nostram de N de prisonibus in ea existentibus deliberandam'. There was, as there had been since the late 13th century, one variant. Such a Commission was without term. When issued to the regular circuit commissioners, it served until another issued; so it is a commonplace to find such Commissions remaining in force for many years. But for many minor gaols; for county gaols when a temporary alteration was necessary among the commissioners; and for both sorts of gaols from the mid-14th century onwards, when sometimes most, or all, of the members of the Commission might be justices of the peace but not serjeants or judges: the Commission was usually framed to permit only a single delivery, by the insertion of the phrase 'hac vice' before 'deliberandam'.

Because the records surviving from such 'one-turn' deliveries are meagre compared with those from the unrestricted, general Commissions, it is not possible to check with any precision the accuracy of the Patent Roll clerks in recording the presence or absence of the phrase. They were well aware of its