INTRODUCTION

Perceptions and portrayals of London 1598–1720

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The year 1598 saw the first publication of what has become the
most famous single work about England's capital – John Stow's
Survey of London. Stow's survey was in part a description of a city that
had already disappeared: as he explained to his readers, 'what
London hath beene of ancient time, men may here see, as what it is
now every man doth beholde'.[1] Some 120 years later, a long-
awaited work with the same title finally emerged. This was an
enlarged and updated version of Stow's *Survey*, compiled by the
famous ecclesiastical historian John Strype. This was in its own way
as monumental as Stow's original work, filling two substantial folio
volumes with its vastly expanded text. In the period between the
two works, London had been dramatically transformed. When Stow
wrote, the city had already undergone the cultural trauma of the
Reformation, but it was also in the throes of major demographic
change. Its population had expanded significantly over the previous
fifty years, and London *c.* 1600 was home to roughly 200,000
people. By 1720, when John Strype produced a new edition of
Stow's work, the city had assumed the character of an enormous
metropolis, its population had soared to more than half a million
people, and it was comfortably the biggest city in Europe.[2] Most of
this massive demographic expansion took place in suburban areas,
formally outside the City's jurisdiction, leaving less than half of
London's population within the City of London proper by the

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[1] Stow, *Survey*, I.xcviii.
[2] For an excellent up-to-date overview of scholarship on London's development in this period,
see J. Boulton, 'London 1540–1700', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain
1540–1700* vol. II (Cambridge, 2000). On London's population in a comparative context see
ibid., pp. 316–17; V. Harding, 'The population of London 1550–1700: a review of the
published evidence', *London Journal* 15 (1990), 112; J. de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500–1800*
(1984), pp. 170–8.

Restoration.[3] This burgeoning metropolis encompassed great con-trasts, including not only areas of great poverty but also what contemporaries increasingly identified as a socially distinctive 'West End'.[4] The resulting urban sprawl was daunting. Indeed, in 1722 one William Stow estimated that a perambulation of the city streets like that conducted earlier by John Stow would have to cover some 250 miles, and include 2,175 streets.[5] In tandem with the relentless extension of the capital's built-up area were new patterns of consumption which in themselves altered the urban environment, with its more negative manifestations seen in new problems of traffic and air pollution.[6] The face of the old City had itself been ravaged by the destruction of the Great Fire, while the Civil War had decisively fractured its religious unity.

The span between these two editions of the *Survey of London* seems an appropriate one to adopt, given the rapid changes that overtook the capital during that period. The demographic and economic changes of this timescale are relatively well known, but an approach which asks how Londoners experienced and understood their city over the same period takes us into less familiar territory. By beginning with Stow, we can start not just with the late sixteenth century, but with one man's memories of the pre-Reformation city, a city which still cast its shadow, even if indirectly, over the seven-teenth-century capital. Taking Strype's edition as our closing point brings us forward to the Georgian city and also allows us to cross the traditional historiographical divide represented by the Civil War.

The manner in which texts such as the *Survey of London* formally provided a structure for London's history is our necessary starting

[3] Recent estimates suggest that the population of metropolitan Westminster, Middlesex, and Surrey increased eightfold between 1580 and 1695, compared with little or no overall increase in the City and its liberties: Boulton, 'London 1540–1700', p. 317, citing R. Finlay, *Population and Metropolis: The Demography of London 1580–1650* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 51–66 and R. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population growth and suburban expansion', in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (1986), pp. 37–59.

[4] M. J. Power, 'The east and west in early-modern London' in E. W. Ives, R. J. Knecht, and J. J. Scarisbrick (eds.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England* (1978), pp. 167–85; M. J. Power, 'The social topography of Restoration London', in Beier and Finlay, *London 1500–1700*, pp. 199–223. The actual term 'West End', however, was only beginning to come into use during our period, with contemporaries more often referring to 'the fashionable end of the town': E. Jones, 'The first West End comedy', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1983), 225–7.

[5] William Stow, *Remarks on London. Being an Exact Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1722), preface.

[6] Boulton, 'London 1540–1700', pp. 324–6.

point. The authors of such works offer obvious and rich subjects for
the analysis of the shifting perceptions of individual inhabitants. But
to recapture something of the mental world of a broader swathe of
early modern Londoners, the contributors to this volume have also
moved forward from the works of historical commentary and
scholarship provided by Stow and Strype. Their sources extend from
livery company, church court, and parochial records to murder
pamphlets, diaries, letters, and architectural treatises. The use of
such a variety of materials also acknowledges the difficulty of
reconstructing contemporary experience. Men and women, recent
migrants, merchants, skilled craftsmen, labourers, and beggars may
not only have conceptualized the capital in different ways, but they
also left us quite different materials for the study of their behaviour
and impressions.

The questions about the early modern metropolis addressed in
this volume fall into three broad categories. The first set of questions
focuses on issues of continuity. Historians are keen to identify the
undoubted changes that occurred during the early modern period,
but to what extent did contemporaries perceive a disjunction
between the physical size, culture, and social relationships of
London past and present? A second set of questions leads us to
consider the nature of metropolitan experience. Did understandings
of the metropolis alter to fit the changing shape of the city? How did
individuals locate themselves – mentally and geographically – within
the city? And did changes in the capital's population, physical
extent, and economic complexity affect social interaction? These
topics bring us to a third related series of issues: evaluations of
London's urbanization. Embedded in many contemporary represen-
tations of London was the assumption that the capital's growth had
a moral impact upon its citizens. But how negative was the assumed
impact of the developing city, and in what ways did people believe
that the deleterious effects of urbanization could be controlled and
countered? And what implications did such ideas have for the
manifold ways in which London was not only perceived, but
portrayed? From the just-remembered, pre-Reformation London of
John Stow to the thrusting, Augustan metropolis which emerges
from the pages of Strype, the following chapters turn their attention
to these questions.

I

To understand how Londoners interpreted the changes which over-
took the early modern city, we must also ask how they understood
and related to London's past. We begin with John Stow himself,
perhaps the most famous encomiast of the pre-Reformation city. For
Stow was writing at a time when London had already undergone a
major cultural transformation over the course of a single lifetime.
Not only had the capital greatly increased in size and population,
but it had also undergone the trauma of the Protestant Reformation.
Stow's *Survey* is thus famously a paean of praise for his own city, but
also a heavily nostalgic one which lingers lovingly over the past but
(more often than not) deplores more recent events. Patrick Collinson
(ch. 1) reminds us of just how far Stow was guilty of a 'selective
nostalgia'. Stow's is a vision which presupposes a changeless London
for the 400 years from the writings of Fitzstephen until the 1530s,
when the old London had changed suddenly and decisively. But
there was more than an old man's regretful nostalgia for what has
passed – there was a strong confessional element, too. In Stow's text
there is an implicit conflation of desecration, the triumph of selfish
individualism over communal endeavour, and the emergence of
Protestantism. Nor is this conflation accidental. As Professor Col-
linson emphasizes, Stow was not simply a man vaguely hankering
after old ways. In the 1560s he was clearly a man with links to a
more assertive and combative confessional Catholicism, although
the official and damaging enquiry into his reading at the end of this
decade seems to have forced him to adopt more circumspect ways
and to avoid direct contact with the forces of political Catholicism.

Stow's *Survey* is in part a work of memory, and Ian Archer (ch. 3)
traces the many other ways in which memory and the past lived on
in the London of the early seventeenth century. He provides a vivid
account of how livery company halls and parish churches might act
as 'theatres of memory'. Here the new acts of charity of those dying
in the post-Reformation city were memorialized by means of a
variety of monuments and rituals which echoed and imitated the
forms of memorialization used in the pre-Reformation church.
Continuity was thus achieved in a way which not only smoothed
over the awkward disjunctions between the immediate and the more
distant past, but which also helped to reinforce the power and
authority of the present governors. Dr Archer reminds us too of the

degree to which these rituals could serve to legitimate a set of unequal power relations, the desire for memorialization also being tied to urgent present-day concerns.

The understanding of links between London's past and present is a major theme in my own chapter (ch. 2). This chapter focuses more directly on the fortunes of Stow's famous text as it was adapted and dramatically expanded during the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Stow's religious nostalgia for an earlier and more compact city might seem to present problems for those trying to celebrate the growing capital within an updated *Survey*. Nevertheless, as this chapter shows, Stow's later editors and 'continuators' found their own ways of adjusting Stow's message to suit the changing Protestant city. Stow's first editor, Anthony Munday, for example, found it possible to engage with the medieval past while placing it in a triumphalist celebration of continuity with the present. In the aftermath of political upheavals, such as the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, different writers raided Stow to create their own variously nostalgic or triumphalist readings of the recent past. By the time that we come to Strype's monumental volumes of 1720, we find Stow's original text carefully presented *within* that of Strype. This manner of presentation acted to preserve in readers' minds a medieval city that had long since disappeared in the face of new urban development and the ravages of the Great Fire. The blending of new and old accounts permitted the post-Fire city to retain its bearings, sense of identity, and continuity with the older city. At the same time, this blend ensured that Stow's nostalgia was partly neutralized by the provision of new information which lauded Protestant achievements, celebrated new developments in the city, and avoided the older historian's conflation of vice and individualism with the expanding city and its new religion.

This strange mélange of new and old, and insistence on continuity in the face of destructive change, is also evident in the reaction to the most traumatic upheaval of all, that of the Great Fire. The destruction of the city did not simply represent the loss of physical buildings. London was also a place permeated with meanings, a theatre of memory.[7] It is all the more striking, then, to note that the post-Fire city was generally rebuilt along the old lines. Despite all the

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[7] C. Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 53 (and generally ch. 2).

grandiose schemes for a dramatically different, refashioned city, the old city was in effect restored, in a piecemeal and idiosyncratic fashion. It is true that the skyline was transformed, the appearance of streets changed dramatically, and the classical style made major inroads; but property boundaries were scarcely altered, the street plan remained the same (apart from where streets were widened), and the old alleys as well as the medieval courtyard houses were rebuilt.[8] There were compelling economic and legal reasons for this restoration of the old city;[9] but Cynthia Wall has recently argued for the presence of cultural factors as well. If the city contained a 'whole abstract network of associative meaning', then it was necessary to restore it in order to preserve such meaning. There would have been an understandable desire to reconstruct the patterns and memory of the old city, a 'cultural preference for recovering the London known and lost, rather than creating a London new and unknown', a desire 'to reinscribe London with familiar spatial meaning'.[10] The very act of recording and surveying the city, carried out so systematically by the post-Fire authorities, was itself a form of memorialization.[11] And like any act of memorialization – indeed, like Stow's own printed *Survey* – it froze and formalized in a more regulated fashion the more randomly evolving past.

Both the Reformation and the Great Fire, then, represented traumatic interruptions in the city's history, and contemporaries dealt with them in a parallel fashion. Partly, they emphasized the positive side of the new – the advent of the true religion and its good works, or the glorious new post-Fire buildings. But in both cases, too, change was neutralized and re-interpreted by a stress on continuity, in cultural and spatial terms, with the preservation of the street plan of the old city, and of Stow's celebration of it.

II

As the city continued to sprawl beyond its traditional boundaries, it posed serious problems for its inhabitants. Memorialization had an

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[8] S. Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud, 1996), ch. 6. For a similar stress on elements of continuity with traditional patterns of building, even in the western suburbs unaffected by the Fire, see E. McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London* (Manchester, 1999).

[9] T. F. Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London After the Great Fire* (1951), chs. 1–4, 6.

[10] Wall, *Literary and Cultural Spaces*, pp. 39–41.

[11] Reddaway, *Rebuilding*, chs. 4 and 6; Wall, *Literary and Cultural Spaces*, ch. 3.

obvious value in investing places and buildings with a sense of identity and meaning. But how were Londoners to locate themselves mentally within the city, and how were they to gain sufficient information to find their way around? Would they develop a new metropolitical self-identity to match the ever-expanding city? Or would they retreat into the smaller districts of the increasingly fragmented metropolis?

Part of the problem of retaining a sense of the enlarged city was that of knowledge acquisition. As Vanessa Harding remarks (ch. 4), John Stow was writing at perhaps the latest time when it was possible for one man to have a personal knowledge of the whole extent of the city (indeed, some would suggest, at a point at which 'the capital ceased to be seen as one entity to those inhabiting it').[12] Stow's *Survey* was in itself a substitute for first-hand knowledge, as were the later guidebooks. There is evidence that Stow's work was used as a guidebook as well as a work of reference kept in parochial libraries. While the later folio continuations of the *Survey of London* by Munday and Strype may not have been easily portable, there is evidence that their owners came to value them as more personal documents, carefully updating material in them by hand and correcting points of detail.[13]

Paul Slack has also suggested that the availability of new and improved city maps, prospects, street plans, and directories may have provided the visual aids which could ensure that people's 'mental maps' preserved a broader sense of the metropolis.[14] There was certainly an explosion in the maps produced in the 1670s and early 1680s, but this partly resulted from the need to survey the new city, and the destruction of stocks of previous maps in the Great Fire. Ogilby and Morgan's map of the rebuilt city in 1676 was truly

[12] J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 293, citing P. Burke, 'Some reflections on the pre-industrial city', *Urban History Yearbook* (1975), 19; P. Burke, 'Urban history and urban anthropology of early modern Europe', in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (1983), p. 81; Finlay, *Population and Metropolis*, p. 155.

[13] X. Baron (ed.), *London 1066–1914* (3 vols., Mountfield, 1997), I, p. 335. See for example Bodl., L.3.7 (Art.) – a copy of the 1633 edition of the *Survey* with MS additions after p. 598 noting lord mayors and epitaphs in churches. Even substantial folio volumes could be used directly as travel guides: the young Bulstrode Whitelocke took Camden's *Britannia* with him as a guide on his travels: R. Spalding, *The Improbable Puritan* (1975), p. 36.

[14] P. Slack, 'Perceptions of the metropolis in seventeenth-century England', in P. Burke, B. Harrison, and P. Slack (eds.), *Civil Histories* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 170–2; for discussion of individual maps and their extent see J. Howgego, *Printed Maps of London c.1533–1850* (2nd edn, 1978).

impressive, but nothing on so large a scale covering the entire city
would be produced again until the mid-nineteenth century.[15] By
1722 William Stow was very dismissive. 'Our Maps, or Prospects of
London, Westminster and Southwark', he commented, were 'made
more for Ornament than Use, [and] do not describe a fourth part
of the Places contain'd in 'em'. Even if a map were to be 30 feet
long and 20 feet deep, Stow claims, it would not comprehend the
town in an exact scale of feet and one would undoubtedly need a
magnifying glass to find relevant details. In addition, 'as it is many
Years since these Maps of London were made, they must be now
most imperfect'.[16]

William Stow was, of course, anxious to emphasize the deficiencies
of maps in order to boost the case for his own street directory, and
he certainly ignored the value of the smaller ward maps being
produced at this time.[17] His own directory might be seen as evidence
of a golden age of user-friendly guides, yet his preface gives equal
evidence of the confusion created by the expanding capital.[18] He
intended his 'Pocket-Companion' partly as a guide for coachmen
and porters, since none of them knew all the streets of London now:
'So large is the Extent of London, Westminster and Southwark, with
their Suburbs and Liberties, that no Coachman nor Porter knows
every Place in them.' William Stow's book would guide them, and
prevent 'their losing any more Portmanteaus, Trunks, Boxes, or
Parcels'. He also hoped to standardize the increasingly chaotic use of
postal addresses. It was intended 'to show People how to spell and
write proper their Superscriptions on Letters; for a bad Hand and
wrong Orthography, or false spelling . . . have caus'd the Miscarriage
of many Letters'. He also noted that letters sometimes miscarried
because people did not know in which part of London a road was
situated – there were, for example, fifteen different King Streets![19]
For all that the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries may
have given rise to a plethora of maps, street directories, and other

[15] Porter, *Great Fire*, pp. 165–6; P. Glanville, *London in Maps* (1972), pp. 26–8; R. Hyde, 'Ogilby
and Morgan's City of London Map, 1676', introduction to *The A to Z of Restoration London*
(London Topographical Society, no. 145, 1992).

[16] Stow, *Remarks*, preface.

[17] On ward maps see R. Hyde, *Ward Maps of the City of London* (London Topographical Society,
no. 154, 1999).

[18] On street directories, see C. W. F. Goss, *The London Directories 1677–1855* (1932); Slack,
'Perceptions', pp. 172–3; M. Harris, 'London Guidebooks before 1800', in R. Myers and
M. Harris (eds.), *Maps and Prints: Aspects of the English Booktrade* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 42–4.

[19] Stow, *Remarks*, preface.

guides to the metropolis, it remains debatable how far these guides really overcame the problems of comprehending the extent of the expanding city. On the level of the individual, there seems little reason to doubt the comment of the Scottish visitor Robert Kirk in 1690 that 'the city is a great vast wilderness. Few in it know the fourth part of its streets. The most attend their business, and an inquisitive stranger will know more of the varieties of the city than an hundred inhabitants.'[20]

If people experienced difficulty in navigating through the streets of London, they had even greater difficulty in gaining first-hand news of what was happening in those streets. The emergence of newspapers might help to bridge this knowledge gap, but not everyone could read them. As Kirk remarked: 'Few in it know the fourth part of its streets, far less can they get intelligence of the hundredth part of its streets, far less can they get one hundredth part of the special affairs and remarkable passages in it, unless by printed public papers, which come not to every man's notice.'[21] Information gleaned from newspapers was, of course, qualitatively different from that gained by verbal reports. For many people, parts of the city may have been becoming places that they read about, rather than places with which they had some tenuous personal link. It is also important to remember that both guidebooks and more scholarly surveys were highly selective in which features and aspects of the capital they portrayed and even which portions of the city received most attention. Stow, Munday, Strype, and others all created their own different 'Londons', based on a distinctive range of priorities and experience. As the Jacobean preacher Thomas Adams commented, London could 'not unfitly be compared to certain pictures that represent to divers beholders, at divers stations, divers forms'.[22] In this way, individuals may have fashioned their own sense of the metropolis.[23]

Printed guides, newspapers, songs and plays, gossip, rumour, oral

[20] D. MacLean and N. Brett-James (eds.), 'London in 1689–90. By Rev. Robert Kirk, MA (Part I)', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, new series, 6 (1933), 333.

[21] *Ibid*. On the growth of newspapers see e.g. M. Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole* (1987); R. B. Walker, 'Advertising in London newspapers, 1650–1750', *Business History* 15 (1973), 112–30.

[22] 'The City of Peace' (1612) in *Works*, ed. J. Angus (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1861–2), III, p. 331; L. Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 2.

[23] This is the world of mental maps, 'the highly subjective ways in which people may experience in their own minds the shapes of the public spaces they inhabit': Jones, 'The first West End comedy', 227; P. Gould and R. White, *Mental Maps* (2nd edn, 1986).

tradition, and other second-hand information would all have played
a part in the creation of each individual's mental map of the city. But
the extent of the city that was experienced first-hand also helped to
determine such mental maps. London's expansion inevitably meant
that it was virtually impossible for people to gain experience of the
entire metropolis. But how far did they range within the city? Here
Robert Shoemaker (ch. 5) notes the importance of gender, occu-
pation, social status, wealth, and cultural attitudes. The immediate
neighbourhood may have been very important to Londoners, but at
the same time people of both sexes frequently moved outside their
parish and neighbourhood (even if in the case of most people they
did not move very far), for reasons of business, leisure, and
accommodation, or just to make social calls. His research suggests a
relative lack of metropolis-wide movement, with the greatest mobi-
lity to be found among the highest and lowest social classes, and with
women's mobility, in particular, being seriously underestimated in
contemporary writing about the capital. Dr Harding, too, notes that
while individuals might move within tight networks of neighbours
and other local acquaintances, they also pursued idiosyncratic social
circuits that could make them familiar with many other parts of the
city, propelled there by business, shopping, religious contacts, or
pleasure. New foci of urban social activity emerging in the later
seventeenth century can only have made such individual social
circuits still more varied.

Similarly, the changing use of language reflected the city's shifting
cultural topography. This is most clearly seen in the language of
urban description, where reference to purely jurisdictional bound-
aries might be found wanting. William Stow, for example, admitted
to bowing to custom in his street directory, by designating certain
Westminster parishes as part of London. As he explained, he only
labelled St Margaret's parish as Westminster (omitting populous
parishes such as St Clement Danes, St Martin in the Fields and the
rest, which should technically have been included) 'because Use and
Custom having gain'd so far as to ascribe them to London, and the
Directions herein being so plain . . . I would not altogether deviate
from what has been habitual to the Generality of the common
People by long Practice.'[24] These western parts of the metropolis

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[24] Stow, *Remarks*, preface. This was not merely a matter of linguistic slippage, but also reflected
important political and cultural developments in the area, and the frustration of efforts
towards the town's incorporation. For attempts to develop a distinctive identity for