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978-0-521-17411-4 - Lost Londons: Change, Crime, and Control in the Capital City, 1550-1660

Paul Griffiths

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Lost Londons

Lost Londons is a major new study of the transformation of early modern London. By focusing on policing, prosecution, and the language and perceptions of the authorities and the underclasses, Paul Griffiths explores the swift growth of London and the changes to its cultures, communities, and environments. Through a series of thematic chapters he maps problem areas and people; reconstructs the atmosphere of the streets; and traces the development of policing in the city. The book provides the first full study of petty crime before 1660, analysing worlds and words of crime, criminal rings and cultures, and tracking changing meanings of crime to reveal new emphases on environmental crimes and crimes committed by women. It also examines the key roles of Bridewell prison, hospitals, medical provision, and penal practices, shedding new light on investigation, detection, surveillance, and public prosecution. Viewed through this unique account, the city will never look the same again.

PAUL GRIFFITHS is Associate Professor of Early Modern British Cultural and Social History at the History Department, Iowa State University. His previous publications include *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (1996), winner of the Royal Historical Society's Whitfield Prize, and, as co-editor, *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500–1900: Punishing the English* (2004).

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For Bob Scribner (1941–1998)

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I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged.

Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1995), pp. 132–3.

Yet there is a sure and necessary empowerment in naming things. Words – and numbers too – may be weightless, as insubstantial as light, yet they are terribly powerful: they can start a war, order the strip-mining of a mountain, or trigger the secretion of endorphins. And names allow us to possess our environment and manipulate it in scaffolds of thought and design.

David G. Campbell, *A Land of Ghosts: The Braided Lives of People and the Forest in Far Western Amazonia* (Boston and New York, 2005), pp. 144–5.

‘People don’t like to have their categories threatened’, says Taylor. ‘They like to think, “That’s a moth” and “That’s a fly”. Fixed categories. They don’t like to think of lots of hybridizing and change all the time’.

Jonathan Weiner, *The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time* (New York, 1994), p. 257.

This city can be known only by an activity of the ethnographic kind: you must orient yourself in it not by book, by address, but by walking, by sight, by habit, by experience; here every discovery is intense and fragile, it can be repeated or recovered only by memory of the trace it has left in you: to visit a place for the first time is thereby to begin to write it: the address not being written, it must establish its own writing.

Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1982), p. 36.

In the anonymous city, in the close quarters of the slum, the overriding interest is law and order, stability.

Suketa Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (New York, 2004), p. 64.

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Abbreviations

APC	J. R. Dasent <i>et al</i> eds., <i>Acts of the Privy Council</i> , 46 vols. (1890–1964)
BHC	Bridewell and Bethlem Hospital Courtbooks
BL	British Library, London
BRHA	Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
CSPV	Calendar of State Papers Venetian
CQSF	City of London Quarter Sessions Files
GCL	Goldsmiths’ Company Library
GL	Guildhall Library, London
HOL	House of Lords Record Office
Jour	Journal of London Common Council
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MP	House of Lords Main Papers
TNA	National Archives
NOTTRO	Nottinghamshire Record Office
Rep	Repertory of the London Court of Aldermen
SBHA	St Bartholomew’s Hospital Archive, London
SCH	Stationers’ Company Hall
SP	State Papers Domestic
SRPC	J. F. Larkin, ed., <i>Stuart Royal Proclamations, Volume 11: Proclamations of King Charles I, 1625–1646</i> (Oxford, 1983)
SRPJ	J. F. Larkin and P. L. Hughes, eds., <i>Stuart Royal Proclamations, Volume 1: Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603–25</i> (Oxford, 1973)
STAC	Star Chamber
TRP	P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin, eds., <i>Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume 3, The Later Tudors, 1588–1603</i> (New Haven and London, 1969)
TT	Thomason Tracts
WAC	Westminster Archives Centre

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Cities were moods, emotional states, for the most part collective distortions, where human beings thrived and suffered, where they invested their souls in pains and pleasures, taking these pleasures and pains as proofs of reality. (Saul Bellow, *The Dean's December* (1998), p. 285).

I want to think of London four centuries or so ago as a city to imagine or perceive. A city that existed in the mind, as well as in wood or brick. One where perceptions of its current state made all the difference for which policy to follow or crime to track down. And a city packed with people who we should evaluate on their own terms, their own senses of what London meant for them, because when all is said and done it was these perceptions that led to each one of the policies and prosecutions that we can count and measure today.

Bellow writes of any city in plurals, as 'moods', 'states', or 'distortions'. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London, too, was a city of pluralities and multiplicities. It was a city marked by difference, needless to say: differing experiences, impressions, standards of living, hopes, and failures. There is no such thing as a single London, except for what it meant to each one of the many thousands who traipsed along its streets each day of the week. Of course London was a physical city, a known space to walk or ride around, but it was also a city to see, take in, perceive, and police if anything was to be done about the growing numbers of vagrants streaming in through its seven gates. In this book London is a city imagined as well as experienced, imagined in mental maps that helped people to get from one place to another, in terms of bright or gloomy impressions of civic prestige and authority, or in more pathological terms as a condition: stable, healthy, unsteady, stormy, or in a mess. There are many more perceptions in the chapters that follow, but for now I want to spell out the significances of images of civic 'fame' and the condition of the city. When I speak of 'Lost Londons' or losing London I am thinking of a train of thought that claimed loudly and clearly that London was suffering a slump in prestige and power in the midst of a population boom and

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migrant influx that gathered pace from about the middle of the sixteenth century. Lost Londons because the city had to be constantly reimagined as one change followed quickly on the heels of another. These same conditions led to perceptions that London was living through ‘extraordinary’ troubled times with one crime-wave after another, all the more interesting because they were expressed in terms of first-hand observation, immediacy, or ‘experience’. The ties between rhetorics and perceptions of declining civic ‘fame’ and London’s troubles are in many ways the crux of this book. I see them tellingly revealed in thinking about crime and criminal cultures, anti-foreigner (migrant) points of view, the City’s crusade to spruce up its ‘filthy’ and tatty parts, the need for a bridewell to come down hard on the shifty poor, and frequent efforts to improve policing. The meanings (and perceptions) of decline and crime/crime control were more or less synonymous at times. In this book, therefore, I explore law and order to learn more about larger London, the city that was growing and changing quickly, with too many negative side-effects, magistrates thought at the time.

Lost Londons is divided into three unequal sections: three chapters on change, two more on crime, and six on control. The first five cover London’s troubles. The second six look at the other side of the coin: steps to keep on top of London’s mass and mess. The opening chapters look at London’s troubles, streets, geographies, and environments at length, and offer new ideas about conditions and cultures there. London’s growth and resulting problems are charted in perceptions first of all, before a more empirical examination of troubles that derived directly from quick growth – building without permission, for example, lodging inmates with no roots in London, vagrants and drifting ‘big bellied women’, and abandoning small children – that all peaked around 1625. I turn next to mapping troubles for better senses of the breeding grounds of crime. The streets are a common thread between growth that was evident up and down their length and breadth and rising crime that left magistrates sometimes holding their hands up in the air in despair. Visuality and visibility were significant for conceptions of crime and the city, and Chapter 3 is about the hustle and bustle on the streets which was the most public sign of both: traffic speeding along all day, beggars pestering passers-by, vagrants walking up and down, unsettled and unwanted, and women (mostly) selling anything from fish to pans all through the city, breaking laws, but needing money to get by. All this activity is a sign of a bigger and busier city, and of vagrant and begging cultures that took root steadily. Next in line is a thick analysis and description of the worlds and words of crime (Chapters 4–5), mixing and mingling vagrants, thieves, prostitutes, and others who caught the eye

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of magistrates. Chapter 4 for the first time turns to widespread archival sources for the full century after 1550 to think once more about the case for criminal underworlds existing in London at this time. Its companion chapter digs deep into labelling languages and processes to track changing meanings of crime from 1560 on. These meanings took a different course after 1600: one new path tilted towards crimes directly related to speedy growth; another, less predictable, was the much greater female involvement in London's troubles.

Policing and prosecution are the leading subjects of the second half of this book. If they got caught and were unlucky enough to end up in court, most vagrants and thieves spent some time in Bridewell, London's main lock-up for petty criminals that took in its first prisoners in 1555. To help us better situate this new prison in London, I spend time in Chapter 6 thinking about attitudes towards it in a range of constituencies from polished legalese to street talk, partly to pick up more about what Londoners thought about crackdowns on crime. A variety of attitudes from warm support to intense legal scepticism are considered not alone but with reference to Bridewell's process and regime (also weighed up with regard to other courts and hospitals/prisons). The next chapter examines the treatment of bodies in Bridewell: looking at cleanliness, sanitation, medical care, bodily discipline, examining bodies for evidence, and punishment. Bridewell also had a policing role, in a minor way with its own beadles, but more importantly with its tight ties to existing policing when it first opened, and later on as it became more heavily involved in attempts to improve policing. The final four chapters cover policing the fast growing city, looking in turn at the men who held office and policies that poured out from the Guildhall (Chapter 8), trouble and policing after dark (Chapter 9), processes of arrest and prosecution (Chapter 10), and some ways in which magistrates made highly effective use of surveillance and records to keep tabs on London's escalating social ills (Chapter 11). My main aim in these last four chapters is to show policing *in action*, with the practical purpose of watching strategies develop over time. I do not dwell for long on the backgrounds of officers or a piece-by-piece institutional inquiry, but seek to get out onto the streets and into courtbooks to show that London would have been in far worse shape without policing that was surprisingly capable and quick-witted. This is first and foremost a book on crime and control, then, but always with larger London in mind. London's growth and changes are the background canvas for each piece of policy and each one of the 40,000 or so crimes that are the mainstay of this book.

I began work on *Lost Londons* not long after I became a research fellow at Clare College, Cambridge, in Autumn 1991. Clare was a perfect place

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to get cracking on it, and I will always be grateful to Clare's master and fellows for giving me a golden opportunity to do so. One of them, in particular, has been (and still is) critical to the development of my thinking on change, crime, and control in early modern England. Bob Scribner is sadly no longer with us, but he first helped me to get my foot in the door at Clare and later, in one sparkling conversation after another that continued up until his last Winter, kept changing my ideas with little gems of wisdom, always making his most forceful points in his softest voice. I dedicate this book to Bob's inspiring memory with deep thanks and happy memories. Roger Schofield has also given me all kinds of help from the time since we first met at Clare. Keith Wrightson supervised my 1992 Cambridge PhD thesis which was published as *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford, 1996), the time when I first thought long and hard about issues at the core of this book, and Keith has given me more guidance about them than he can ever imagine. No mention of the friends/scholars who have helped me the most over the last two decades or so could ever be complete without Ian Archer, John Beattie, Ian Gentles, Martin Ingram, Mark Jenner, Dave Postles, Dave Rollison, Jim Sharpe, and Andy Wood.

Money matters, too, and I have been lucky enough to get support to help research and write *Lost Londons* from Clare College (Cambridge), the British Academy, the University of Leicester, Iowa State University College of Liberal Arts and Science, the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and Arts and Humanities Centre, the National Endowment of the Humanities, and the National Humanities Centre (NHC) in North Carolina, where I had the best part of a year to do nothing else except write in excellent company and with the sort of support that gives no excuse for not finishing something. The 2002-3 NHC fellows were a great bunch, but I would like to give special thanks to Ed Craun, Andy Delbanco, Ginger Frost, David Porter, Joanne Rappaport, Moshe Sluhovsky, and Harriet Ritvo, and our warm little group in the Renaissance seminar. The NHC staff were first-rate, just like the staff of the various archives I have worked in. I cannot be the only London historian who misses the old Corporation of London Record Office (CLRO) now that it too is a thing of the past, not least because Vivienne Aldous, Sophie Bridges, Hugo Deadman, Larry Francis, Philip Gale, Tim Harvey, Elizabeth Scudder, and Jim Sewell, did so much to help my research tick along. I think that I spent more time in the CLRO than any other archive, but the Guildhall Library, Manuscripts Division, was not far behind, and the same thanks for the same amount of help go to the people who have worked there ever since I first dropped in to read something in 1988. Thanks, too, to the staff at my other main ports-of-call: the London

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Metropolitan Archives, Westminster Archive Centre, St Bartholomew's Hospital Archive, the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum, the old Public Record Office (now The National Archives), British Library, and Cambridge University Rare Books Reading Room and Manuscripts Room (and especially Godfrey Waller). My warm thanks also to all who listened and offered suggestions when various versions of some chapters were presented at seminars and conferences in Boston, Brisbane, Cardiff, Cambridge, Durham, Flagstaff, Guelph, Leicester, London, the National Humanities Centre, New Orleans, Oxford, San Marino, Toronto, Victoria (British Columbia), and York. I hope that I haven't missed out anyone who gave references and suggestions, or just sat down to chat one day about something in this book: Kevin Amidon, Ian Archer, Phil Baker, John Beattie, Peter Borsay, Bernard Capp, David Cressy, Simon Devereaux, Adam Fox, Malcolm Gaskill, Laura Gowing, Vanessa Harding, Tim Harris, Cynthia Herrup, Steve Hindle, Tim Hitchcock, Martin Ingram, Mark Jenner, Peter King, Randall McGowen, John Morrill, John Monroe, Maggie Pelling, Dave Postles, Dave Rollison, Ulinka Rublack, Alan Stewart, Bob Tittler, Phil Withington, and Andy Wood have all made *Lost Londons* a better book. Ian Gentles, Mark Jenner, and Andrejs Plakans all read draft chapters, and I am deeply grateful to them, and even more so to Ian Archer, Moshe Sluhovsky, and Keith Wrightson, who slogged through the whole thing for me.