

PAPERS READ AT THE 51st LAMAS LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON, 19 NOVEMBER 2016: ‘WALKING THROUGH LONDON’S HISTORY’

MAPPING MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN LONDON

Caroline Barron (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Vanessa Harding (Birkbeck, University of London)

The talk focused on *A Map of Tudor London 1520* (published by Old House Books in conjunction with The Historic Towns Trust in 2013) which was displayed on the screen.

Making the Map

The International Commission for the History of Towns was set up in 1955 under the Presidency of Professor Philippe Wolff of Toulouse who defined the purposes of the European Commission. It was established to enable the comparative study of European towns, many of which had suffered so much destruction in the Second World War, and to help to protect the old historic centres of towns which were then being threatened by a large amount of redevelopment, in order that children, in Professor Wolff’s words, would not grow up in ‘soulless cities’.

The two key figures in carrying the British enterprise forward were Mary Lobel (known as Roddy), who had edited the Oxfordshire Victoria County History and now became the

General Editor of the project, and Colonel Henry Johns, the topographical mapping editor, a veteran of the Second World War, who was at that time working in the cartographic department of the Clarendon Press.

The first volume of city maps appeared in 1969 and was followed by a second volume in 1975. Meanwhile, it had been decided to tackle London. This provided a much greater challenge than any of the towns mapped so far, because London had undergone much greater changes than any of the other towns and cities. Before the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, London had some thirty religious houses. Their rapid takeover was prompted in part by London’s massive growth of population: from some 50,000 in 1500 to 200,000 in 1600. While the burgeoning population pushed London’s suburbs out into the green fields around the city, the Great Fire of 1666 destroyed about two thirds of the medieval heart of London. The railways and new roads of the Victorian period gouged out large chunks of the city, and the bombing of the Second World War led to further destruction and redevelopment. So it was decided that the London map should focus on the period before the Dissolution, and attempt to map the historic medieval city.

This was a challenging enterprise. It was

decided to use the map compiled by John Ogilby and published in 1676 as the base. The few surviving buildings were mapped, new archaeological evidence was included, and the previous work of historians such as Marjorie Honeybourne was incorporated. John Stow's *A Survey of London* published in 1598 was read from cover to cover, and new research on the voluminous deeds surviving from the medieval period was undertaken. All this research was documented in a gazetteer which listed every place recorded on the maps in the volume, and explained the sources used. *The City of London from Prehistoric Times to c. 1520* was finally published in 1989. The 'main' map of c.1520 in the *Atlas* volume covers four double-spread pages. In several places the map could only chart the 'best guesses' of historians, but for the first time there was a proper (as opposed to a sketch) map of the City of London in the medieval period.

In 2008 the Historic Towns Trust decided to publish the 1520 map as a single folding map in partnership with Old House Books. This 'pocket' edition proved very popular, selling several thousand copies, and has now effectively sold out.

Using the Map

This modern map of London c.1520, though entirely artificial, is in many ways a better guide to mid-Tudor London than actual maps and views created in the 16th century. It presents the past using symbols and conventions from the present. It allows us to view the city plan from above – in the way we have become used to visualising town plans – but also to translate this overview into pedestrian routes and place-finding in a way we are familiar with from our use of A to Z maps, Google maps and so on. It is drawn to scale, so distances are realistic, and it is based on combining information from multiple sources not all of which would have been available to any contemporary Londoner. Even John Stow, Londoner born and bred and assiduous chronicler and explorer of the city, did not have access to the records of central government, or the property transactions and wills of private citizens which have been used, directly or indirectly, to construct the map.

The map can be used to find places in early to mid-Tudor London and visualise their surroundings. Readers of *Wolf Hall* (Mantel 2009) may wish to locate the site of Thomas Cromwell's house in Austin Friars, and the gazetteer and key take you straight to Austin Friars, even though, in 1520, Cromwell wasn't yet living there. The map locates the city's hundred-odd parish churches, most of which are completely lost to sight today. An accurately scaled map allows the reader to appreciate shifts of scale and space – the narrow streets and narrower alleys, compared with the breadth of Cheapside – though like most maps it doesn't show contours, key features for the pedestrian, so the steep slopes down to the river and the central dip where the culverted Walbrook flows through the city are hidden.

The map lets you see how far apart, or how close, places were, and to trace itineraries such as royal entries and civic processions. Katherine of Aragon, arriving to marry Prince Arthur in 1501, was entertained by pageants:

first at the Bridge, at the Conduit in Gracechurch Street, the Conduit in Cornhill, the Standard in Cheapside, [with] the cross new gilded, at the Little Conduit, and at Paul's west door. (Greyfriars' Chronicle 1852, author's translation)

The Midsummer Watch, we are told by Stow:

passed through the principal streets thereof, to wit, from the litle Conduit by Paules gate, through west Cheape [Cheapside], by y^e Stocks, through Cornhill, by Leaden hall to Aldgate, then backe downe Fenchurch streete, by Grasse church, aboute Grasse church Conduite, and vp Grasse church streete into Cornhill, and through it into west Cheape againe. (Stow 1908)

Though the map shows London nearly 80 years before the publication of Stow's *Survey* in 1598, it is the city he grew up in, and reading the map alongside the perambulation recorded in the *Survey* adds another dimension to both.

Improving the Map

The Historic Towns Trust,¹ which now holds

the rights, has decided to reprint the map in an improved format, incorporating revisions and new information. The map of London c.1520 published in 1989 is not of course infallible; scholars with detailed knowledge of particular areas have found errors or disagreed with interpretations, and the map represents the state of archaeological knowledge and cartographic expertise in 1989. Since then a good deal of excavation and research has taken place, especially on the sites of London's religious houses and the waterfront, and new discoveries have been made, such as the third plate of the 'Copperplate' map of c.1560. A reprinted map will incorporate corrections and new or revised information. New cartographic work will enhance the visual appearance and clarity of the map, and further useful information, such as parish boundaries, will be displayed. The new map will be presented in the same format as the Trust's new towns and cities maps (Oxford, Winchester), Ordnance Survey style, at the larger scale of 1:2,500, with colour on front and back, a revised gazetteer and cover blurb, and new in-text illustrations.

All this will create a better – more legible and accurate – hard-copy map, which the reader can use as before, affordable and portable but static. However, as part of the process of revising the map for print publication, a georeferenced digital version will be created. Not simply a flat image, but one constructed from separable information layers. This will make possible exciting new ventures: a link with the Heritage Lottery funded Layers of London project,² for example; online presentation and interactive tagging; sharing and exchanging data with other researchers on medieval and early modern London. In the longer term, the Trust aims to create a wholly new map of London on the eve of the Great Fire. This last is a very ambitious and expensive project, however, on a much larger scale: London's population and built-up area increased eightfold between 1520 and 1660. In the meantime, the Trust (which is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation) is seeking financial support for the new edition of the 1520 map, which it is estimated will cost around £10,000, for publication in 2018.

Notes

- 1 Historic Towns Trust, <http://www.historic-townsatlas.org.uk> (accessed 13 February 2017).
- 2 Layers of London, <http://layersoflondon.blogs.sas.ac.uk> (accessed 13 February 2017).

Bibliography

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- Mantel, H, 2009 *Wolf Hall*, Bath
- Stow, J, 1908 (1603) *A Survey of London. Reprinted From the Text of 1603*, C L Kingsford (ed), Oxford, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/survey-of-london-stow/1603/pp99-104> (accessed 12 February 2017).