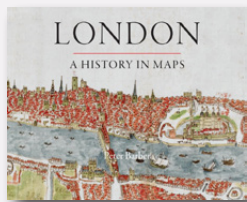


## LONDON: A HISTORY IN MAPS



By Peter Barber, with notes on the engravers by Laurence Worms, edited by Roger Cline and Ann Saunders.

The London Topographical Society in association with the British Library, 2012.

380 pages, 97 color maps, 48 views, 62 plans, 9 paintings, and 10 photos, 43 miscellaneous (images, text, architectural drawings, cartoons, etc.). \$45.00, cloth.

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**Review by:** Patti Day, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

*London: A History in Maps* is the result of an exhibition about the U.K. capital city that was held at the British Library from November 2006 to March 2007. Organized by Peter Barber, Head of Maps at the British Library, the exhibition coincided with the publication of Peter Whitfield's *London: A Life in Maps*, for which, unfortunately, there was neither a catalog nor a compiled list of captions. Acknowledging this gap, the Council of the London Topographical Society undertook to publish every illustrated item, in part or whole, along with captions, resulting in this beautiful publication.

The book illustrates and explains the metamorphosis of London from small town to one of the world's greatest cities. It presents not only official plans and maps but also those produced by individuals and groups as everyday documents for public use. As noted in the introduction, the volume endeavors to provide a balanced and inclusive view, one that documents the concerns, assumptions, and prejudices of the map makers and their times, while providing a unique perspective on the geography of London and the lives of its inhabitants. As a result, the maps and panoramas "are far more than topographical records...occasionally revealing attitudes which were too crass to be put into writing" (viii).

As the title indicates, this volume is not simply a historical London atlas, but rather a documentation of the history of the city. As such, the book incorporates not only traditional maps and plans, but also novel images of items such as the city's seals, cartoons, views, paintings, architectural

drawings, photographs, letters, and the products of GIS analysis.

The volume is divided into eight sections, which proceed roughly chronologically from 50 CE to contemporary (post-2012) plans for the future, although there is considerable overlap between time periods. Sub-sections are based around significant events that punctuated the development of the city. The sections are

1. "The Walled City 50–1066;"
2. "London Reborn," covering the reconstruction of the city after the great fire of 1066;
3. "Sweet Salutarie Air: London Countryside," describing the growth of the city and its interaction with the surrounding countryside;
4. "Out of Sight: The East End and Docklands," areas which before the 1650s were "ignored on printed maps of London" (140);
5. "The Age of Improvement," which includes the Regency period;
6. "The Mean Streets of Victorian London," during which period "the city more than doubled in size and population" (218);
7. "Metroland," which documents how the area around London changed prior to Green Belt legislation in 1938; and finally
8. "Maps in Modern London," essentially after World War II.

Generally, each section concludes with vignettes about the lives of Londoners during the relevant time period. Also included are separate entries about the engravers and publishers of the maps, together with interesting ancillary observations and pertinent information. The call numbers of the relevant British Library holdings are both helpful



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to researchers and a tantalizing indication of the British Library's cartographic riches.

The entire volume exceeds the author's expressed aspirations to present an honest and inclusive representation of London. I particularly appreciated the author's perspectives on the history of mapping, which includes analysis and documentation of the highly selective nature of maps and mapping throughout history. The analysis of the motives of cartographers and publishers in particular is outstanding, being something few other books of this type include and a worthwhile addition to any publication discussing the history of cartography.

The book incorporates numerous references to contemporaneous social conditions in the city, which helps to situate the maps and other items culturally. The inclusion of materials other than maps and plans—letters, photographs, text, architectural drawings, cartoons, and even a poem—facilitates a deeper understanding of London's changing socioeconomic conditions. The layout of two pages per item (generally) allows the author to provide a comprehensive account of each item and also permits inset views of that which is described in the text. The descriptions of the items and the accounts of social conditions are outstanding, providing much more information than the items themselves possibly could. Barber not only documents the history of the city cartographically, but also describes the evolution of land ownership and outlines changes in the processes used in mapping through the ages. He gently yet effectively illustrates the historical human cost of metropolitan life for those not of the wealthy classes, while also drawing attention to the role of the wealthy in influencing the cartography of the times. Included are “must-read” accounts of episodes such as the 1790s fashion for the “optical tricks” of telescopic views, a synopsis of the origins of the Ordnance Survey, a discussion of John Snow's cholera map, and the story of Harry Beck's iconic map of the Tube, London's underground train system.

The entire volume is exceptionally well written and is a delight to read, including, for example, the elegant description of “ancient towns and villages now absorbed into Greater London...[that] were shown like stars surrounding the central sun of London” (104). The history of land ownership and the changes in settlement patterns are well documented and make for compelling reading. For example, during the post-Reformation period, the former monastic estates were distributed into the hands of secular families,

who eventually subdivided and sold them, facilitating the development of the gentry's villas and parks. These estates survived into the nineteenth century, when most were sold and developed for urban housing, with the original landowners' family names perpetuated in street nomenclature.

Section Four vividly describes London's East End and the Docklands, which were not shown on printed maps prior to the 1650s, when maps depicted nothing beyond the Tower of London. Even though the East End played a vital role in generating the profits that allowed the West End to flourish and prosper, it wasn't until the development of the new docks in the 1790s that mapping of the area came to be considered essential. The inclusion of plans that document the tenements to be demolished illustrates the human costs borne by “the poorest classes” and the steep price they paid with the coming of the docks (162). These details vividly outline the social divides of the city between the wealthy and the poor, a concept mirrored in Section Six, which includes the first use of thematic maps to identify disease, squalor and poverty. One view from 1844 inspires the statement that “One can almost feel the dirt, dust and pollution” (230).

The advent of railways and the car changed London and its environs radically, a transformation that is well documented by the selected maps and plans. Section Seven depicts vividly the changes wrought by an increasing population, new means of transport, and new building techniques, which led to increasing social expectations between 1850 and 1945. “Maps had to change radically in appearance to be of real use in this changed environment” (282). There are wonderful descriptions of Phyllis Pearsall's first A to Z map and the Ordnance Survey's one-inch to the mile Popular Edition series. The section concludes with the destruction of the two World Wars, and the inclusion of part of an elementary school student's poignant essay about a 1915 Zeppelin raid provides another striking example of how seemingly inanimate historical events are tied inexorably to intimate human impacts. A stark reminder is provided by WWII German maps showing the principal bombing targets along the Thames, particularly the Docklands. Something of which I was previously unaware is that immediately after the WWII air raids, surveyors were sent out to map the damage to individual buildings and to identify areas for post-war reconstruction. These maps furnished me with a greatly heightened understanding of the degree of destruction wrought upon London, and increased my appreciation for the personal stories of

my parents-in-law about nights on rooftops watching for rockets, bombs and fires.

Section Eight discusses the impacts of Geographic Information Systems, whose “low price and relative ease of production have also had the effect of democratizing map making, rendering it easier for the disadvantaged and for minorities to present viewpoints which often question the assumptions of the majority or highlight problems which might otherwise be glossed over” (344). Following post-WWII reconstruction, materials illustrate the turbulent post-1960s era of job losses, homelessness, and the provision of social services. The housing crisis during the economic downturn of the 1980s shows a city in social decline at the same time that tourism and the financial sector are “taking off.” “Swinging London” of the 1960s is depicted by a delightfully psychedelic Carnaby Street panorama reminiscent of Beatles’ album covers (356). Plans for Docklands redevelopment and others showing the upward growth of the city use the latest techniques to illustrate how the old and new can be combined in the present and future.

This work effectively accomplishes the author’s efforts to provide a truthful view of the history of this historic city. The general index and the separate index of people are both thorough and valuable for identifying not only cartographers and publishers but also people depicted in views, and for locating individual buildings, such as hospitals, and linking such diverse items as street names, sports (cricket), individual docks, and museums. There also is a helpful select reading list on historic maps of London, divided into bibliographies, monographs, and websites.

I did find that showing the majority of maps on only one page, with insets on the opposite page, sometimes resulted in me missing details of maps that might have warranted a two-page spread. There are a few examples where the original map was simply too large to condense onto a single page, and these were handled extremely well without any part of the map being “lost” to the binding. Such care typifies the overall quality of the work, and one wishes that all such volumes showed such attention to detail.

Having visited London but never having lived there, I sometimes needed a modern street map to help me place and appreciate the early maps. Fortunately, my spouse grew up in suburban London and assisted me in reconciling the historical and contemporary maps, but for those lacking a detailed geographical knowledge of the area, a simple modern street map of the central part of the city somewhere in the volume would have been helpful.

Overall, I highly recommend this book to all public and academic libraries and to anyone interested in the history of London. The price, the vast amount of information included, the writing and the range of items included makes this an extremely valuable aid to anyone seeking to understand this great city. We should all be grateful to Peter Barber, Laurence Worms, Roger Cline, Anne Saunders, the British Library, and Council of the London Topographical Society for this outstanding contribution. I sincerely wish I had seen the exhibit itself, but this volume certainly does it credit.

## THE WORLD AT THEIR FINGERTIPS: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH TWO-SHEET DOUBLE-HEMISPHERE WORLD MAPS



By Geoff Armitage and Ashley Baynton-Williams.

British Library, 2012.

262 pages, 155 color plates.  
\$65.00, cloth.

ISBN 978-0-7123-5877-4

**Review by:** Ian Muehlenhaus, James Madison University

*The World at Their Fingertips* is a book with a two-pronged mission: first, to definitively establish British two-sheet, double-hemisphere world maps as a distinct cartographic

genre, and second, to create as complete a catalog of such maps as possible, while concurrently exploring their history. Using the extensive collection of these maps housed at the British Library, the authors looked at “virtually all examples” of these maps that still exist in Britain in an attempt to establish a double-hemisphere world map genealogy of sorts. The book is very focused on achieving its goals, and it certainly achieves what the authors set out to accomplish.

Overall, the book is best summarized by its title; it is what it portends to be. Early on, the authors argue that