

London: A Life in Maps by Peter Barber

London: A Life in Maps will be the first exhibition for over forty years devoted to the development and mapping of London over the 2,000 years of its existence. Since the last exhibition in 1964 much has changed in our knowledge of London's past and of its maps. Popular and academic attitudes towards mapping and what it can reveal about the spirit as well as the geographical form of the past have also altered radically.

The exhibition at the British Library from 24th November will illustrate how the image of London has evolved over nearly 2,000 years and how maps and panoramas have reflected the mentalities, concerns and interests of Londoners. It will be enlivened with letters, diaries and other memorabilia.

The first section begins with the earliest depiction of London – on a gold medal of AD 296 that will be on display in London for the first time – and takes the story up to the time of the Great Fire of 1666. A view of London from the Tower of about 1480, one of the copperplates used for the earliest-known printed map of London of the later 1550s, the autograph diary of John Evelyn and the unique manuscript survivor of the survey commissioned while the ashes were still warm, are among the treasures that will illustrate the story. London had several generally-accepted set images – particularly as a walled city and as a city on the Thames seen from the East – before the creation of what is now the standard view from Bankside dating from the 1540s and typified by the extensive panoramas by William Smith in 1588, Visscher of 1616 and by Hollar of 1647. Other images which did not catch on, such as an extremely rare printed view of London from the North of about 1600, will also be on show. From early on maps also reflected the seamy reality as well as the sanitised beauty of the official images and these are shown in a detailed map of Charterhouse's water supply of about 1450, owned by Charterhouse, a map of lawlessness in Southwark of the early 1540s from the National Archives and another by Ralph Treswell of 1612 showing houses in the vicinity of the Fleet Ditch owned by the Clothworkers' Company.

The second section follows the revival and expansion of London in the late seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries when it overtook Paris as the largest city in Europe. It reveals how that expansion came about despite official efforts to curb London's growth, where the expansion occurred and the lives led in the elegant new aristocratic estates of the West End. At the same time this section will illustrate the pastimes of Londoners. As well as large maps of the whole of London and Westminster by Ogilby and Morgan of 1676 and 1681, by John Rocque of 1746 and a magnificent panorama of London from St James's Park of about 1716, there will be a sketch by Hawksmoor for the steeple of St Bride's church and a manuscript plan



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of Whitehall Palace (the largest palace in Europe of the time) which doubles as a key to the power structure of Great Britain in about 1670, and items such as a manuscript survey of East Cheap of 1686. The earliest known map of Mayfair and Belgravia (dating from 1665) and an early plan of St James's Square, identifying the house owners, have never been exhibited before.

The third section deals with the East End, the generator of the wealth that was spent in the West End, but until the early nineteenth century an area that was not felt worthy of inclusion on most maps of London. The great 1703 map of the parish of Shoreditch by Joel Gascoyne, made at a time when the population was expanding at a rapid rate and the hamlets within it were trying to be made into parishes in their own right, will be accompanied by Hawksmoor's manuscript design for the church of one of the parishes that soon emerged, Christchurch Spitalfields, and by a plan of Deptford in 1623, in its early days as a royal dockyard, annotated by John Evelyn in about 1690. There will be a reminder of the gentility of much of what is now the East End in the form of an elegant watercolour of West Ham village in about 1750 by Jean Baptiste Chatelain. The coming of the great commercial dockyards after 1799, which enabled London to cope with an enormous increase in trade in the late eighteenth century and forced East London on to all future maps of London, will be illustrated through plans that were specially annotated for George III and an aquatint panorama by William Daniel.

The fourth section deals with the other major changes between 1750 and 1850, many of them directed by government and on Crown land, that were to change the face of the metropolis. In addition to Richard Horwood's enormous map of 1799, the last to show London as a walkable city, this will include Robert Adams's little known plan and elevation for a grand entrance to London at Hyde Park Corner, the unique surviving architectural plan for the Adelphi, plans and views for what were to become Regent Street, Regent's Park and Trafalgar Square and the Thames Tunnel as well as George Scharf's panoramic lithographs of the rebuilding of London Bridge (with some of his preparatory drawings) of the 1830s. In these years London mushroomed. Already the largest city in Europe, by the end of the period it became the largest city in the world.

The fifth section will deal with the villages that now constitute greater London. These had had lives and centuries' old histories of their own and the exhibition will show the stages by which they began to be integrated within the metropolis, though until the mid-nineteenth century most still remained separated by green fields. Here the exhibits will extend in time from 986 (a charter defining the boundaries of Hampstead) to detailed square and circular printed maps of London and its surroundings from the 1800s. They include the great Rocque map of the country around London of 1746, his manuscript plan of the country estate of Edward Gibbons's parents in Putney, John Corris's plan of the rural manor of Putney in the 1770s created for the lord of the manor, Lord Spencer, and a vast plan of the manor of St John of Jerusalem of about 1810 which covers the land from St John's Gate in Clerkenwell to Hornsey Lane. Throughout this period, the country villages contained the

weekend and summer homes of well-to-do Londoners. Rocque's magnificent plan with views by Rocque of the Earl of Tilney's vast mansion at Wanstead in the 1730s and a plan and elevation by one of George IV's favourite architects, Henry Holland, of his own country "pavilion" in Chelsea of 1790, will illustrate how the surroundings of London were transformed after 1600 from vast estates, originally owned by the church to a patchwork of villas with small parks owned by wealthy Londoners which in their turn eventually gave way to the familiar semis and terraces of today. A beautifully executed watercolour view of 1811, showing the Knightsbridge turnpike, gives an example of the improved roads that made daily commuting possible and helped to create a suburban mentality long before the outer suburbs came into being.

By 1850, administrative structures and drains that had barely been adequate for seventeenth-century London could no longer cope. The burgeoning population was accompanied by equally enormous and growing problems that could only be dealt with by bodies with some power over the whole of the built-up area. Section six contains the maps and panoramas that illustrate this growth, analysed the resulting problems and suggested solutions that were sometimes enacted. They vividly illustrated the growing ethnic diversity of London (though this had been present since Roman times) and the enormous number of Victorian Londoners who had been born elsewhere in the country. They pinpointed the whereabouts and extent of poverty (and wealth) and, almost incidentally, the unhealthy living conditions that were made worse by the demolitions to make space for new roads, railways and railway stations and by recurrent visitations of cholera. As well as the Stanford Library maps in

various guises and a sheet from Charles Booth's Master Map of London poverty, this will also include fire insurance plans demonstrating the awful living conditions along the banks of the Thames immortalised by Dickens (who had grown up among them), a map of the Jewish population of the East End in 1890, plans revealing the ruthlessness but also the idealism of Victorian developers and others showing the open spaces and improved housing, schools, social amenities and



Hollar's map of London after the Great Fire. 1667

sewage treatment that were responses to the problems.

The seventh section charts the development of London from about 1850 to 1945. This was the age of the development of metro- (but also Pooter-) land, the coming of novel purpose-built buildings like the great restaurants, hotels, stores, theatres and museums, of widespread and extensive mobility, and of the revolution in leisure. It also witnessed the publication of those two icons of modern London, the A-Z and the Underground map, though each had far older origins.

The end of the period was marked by the traumas of the two world wars. The exhibits here will include a sheet from the first official map to record who owned what in London, a plan of South Kensington showing the site for the museums and the Albert Hall before development, the plan for the British Museum Reading Room that was submitted to its trustees, a detailed early plan of Harrods, plans of the damage wrought by bombs in the First and Second World Wars and a map of London produced in Berlin in August 1940 identifying the streets through which its creators assumed the German forces would sweep through the capital on their triumphant passage northwards.

The last section shows the revival of London after wartime experiences that were regarded as tantamount to a second Great Fire. Centralised planning and comprehensive redevelopment coexisted with unbridled commercial development and concerns about conservation, "Swinging" and "Cool" London with homelessness, ethnic tensions and traffic congestion – none of them quite so novel as some might think. Maps for the 1948 Olympics will be seen near a psychedelic panorama of Carnaby Street of 1970. The early twenty-first century brings London – now perhaps the most international of all the world's cities – continued strains and further challenges, notably renewed population growth and the possible consequences of climate change in terms of flooding. Modern mapping of London can now merge in a single digitised system the plans, views and panoramas that had hitherto run parallel to each other. But it continues to reflect as its predecessors had the concerns and



Rocque's view of the Earl of Tilney's mansion of Wanstead House in the 1730s

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visions of its age – and particularly the next great London event, the 2012 Olympics.

Much of the impact of the exhibition will come from the display of the series of great original maps and panoramas revealing the growth of London from about 1250 to the 1850s. The exhibition will also give the British Library the chance to show many of its smaller and less well-known treasures with several items that as far as is known have never been exhibited before.

The visitor will be able to approach the exhibition in several ways. If short of time he or she can view the exhibition almost as an art exhibition. If more time is available, or a second visit is made, or if there is an aspect that is of particular interest, the visitor will be able to use a series of drawers containing further images and fascinating documents and ephemera to drill below the surface of the image displayed above.

The exhibition **London: A Life in Maps** opens at the British Library on 24th November and runs until March 2007. Admission is free.

