Then and There Series

London in the Eighteenth Century

J. Dymoke

THEN AND THERE SERIES

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London in the Eighteenth Century

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TO THE READER

EVERY fact in this book comes from some record written at the time the book is describing; nothing has been invented in these pages, which seek to be a true record of the life and thought of the people who lived in London during the middle years of the eighteenth century. The diaries and letters and books they wrote are original sources to which historians have to go back for their information.

In the same way, every picture in this book is based on a drawing made by someone who lived then and there.

By studying what people said in word and picture about themselves, you will come to feel at home in one 'patch' of the history of the past and really live with the group of people as they thought and worked then and there. And gradually you will be able to fill in more patches of history.

As you read, you will sometimes find a word written like *this*. You can find the meaning of these words in the Glossary on page 91. If there are other words you do not know, look for their meanings in your dictionary.

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LONDON TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO

LISTEN to the noises of London as you wake up tomorrow morning. Most of them are the same as in any other town today—the noise of motor-cars and lorries and buses, the sound of an express train off on its journey to another town or of an aeroplane on its way to another country or continent. Near the river you may hear a ship's siren hooting, and in some places you can hear the low rumble of an underground train.

Now listen to London two hundred years ago. The sounds are very different. Can you hear the rumble of cart-wheels and the clatter of horses' hooves as the big carts roll into the city from the country, laden with fresh fruit and vegetables for the markets? These heavy carts make a great deal of noise on the cobblestones, and the drivers are calling to their horses or shouting to other drivers who get in their way in the narrow streets.

Can you hear the street-cries? Many people sell their goods in the streets and they all have their own special cries—the apple-woman, the bellows-mender, the milk-girl, and many others sell every kind of article from matches, doormats, brooms, baskets, and lavender to hot ginger-bread, muffins, rabbits, and each of the fruits in its proper season.

In the pictures below you can see a girl selling baskets, and a man selling old clothes. How does the girl carry her baskets? Do you notice that the man has several hats for sale balanced on top of his own hat?

Other street-cries you might hear are:

"Buy my duke cherries. Quite ripe, sir."

"Buy my fresh mackerel."

"A bed mat or a door mat."

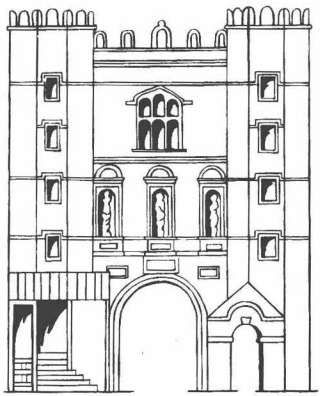
In those days London was much smaller than it is now, so the street sellers did not have to walk as far to sell their goods as they would today.

London today covers an area of over 700 square miles and is the largest city in the world, but if you look at the map on page 4 you will see that it was really quite a small place two hundred years ago. In those days there was no building north of Portland Street where the B.B.C. now stands, or beyond Tottenham Court Road and, further

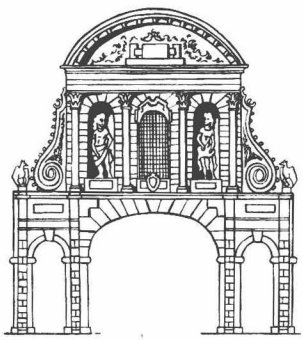
to the east, Old Street. Islington and Hampstead were villages then, across the fields to the north of the City.

To the east the buildings thinned out near the docks—a very busy part of London these days—and Mile End was still a small market town. To the west many wealthy people lived in fine houses round Grosvenor Square and near St. James's Palace and Hyde Park, but Kensington and Chelsea were no more than little villages and a good many of the rich folk built their country houses in the pleasant countryside beyond. South of the Thames there was very little building beyond Kennington Common; the fields and orchards were only a short walk down the Kent Road.

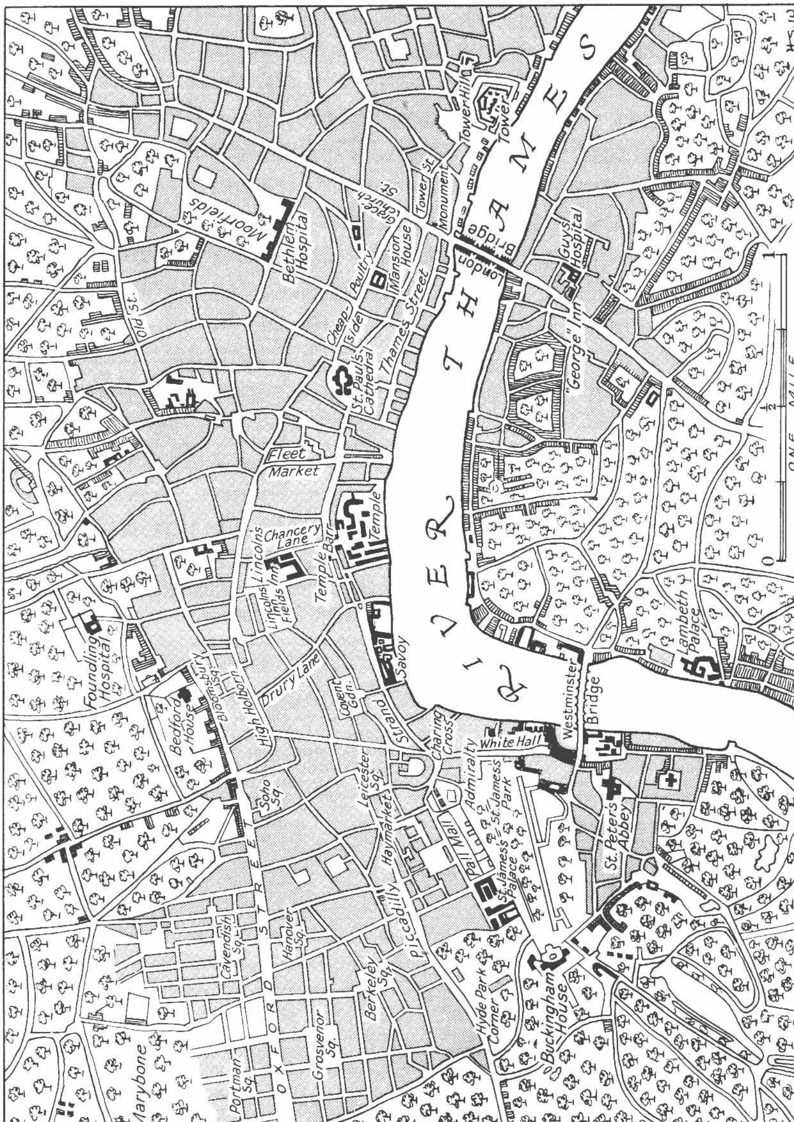
You probably know that London was a walled city once, but in the eighteenth century no one bothered much about the walls, though the gates round the City remained in use. Here are pictures of two of them. Temple Bar was at the western boundary of 'the City', but London had spread well beyond this in 1750.



Newgate



Temple Bar


RIVER THAMES
London Bridge
Westminster Bridge
Tower
Tower Hill
Monument
Tower St.
Grace church St.
Mansion House
Poultry
Cheap-side
Thames Street
St. Paul's Cathedral
Bethlem Hospital
Moorfields
Old St.
Fleet Market
Chancery Lane
Temple Barr
Temple
Lincolns Inn
Lincolns Inn Fields
Savoy
Strand
Drury Lane
Covent Gdn.
High Holborn
Bloomsbury Sq.
Bedford House
Founding Hospital
Charing Cross
White Hall
Admiralty
St. James Park
Leicester Sq.
Soho Sq.
Haymarket
Pall Mall
St. James's Palace
Piccadilly
Hyde Park Corner
Buckingham House
St. Peter's Abbey
Lambeth Palace
Guy's Hospital
"George" Inn
Berkeley Sq.
Hanover Sq.
Cavendish Sq.
Grosvenor Sq.
Portman Sq.
OXFORD STREET
Marybone
ONE MILE
0
1/2
1
H.S.W.

How do we know the size and shape of London two hundred years ago? Old drawings and maps are our chief source of knowledge. There are a good many old prints—black-and-white drawings—to be seen: you can often find them in the windows of second-hand bookshops. The map opposite was made by John Roque in 1746. He was a very good *topographer*—a grand name for a map-maker—and his maps are very accurate. If you look at the picture below you will see how he measured the roads when he was making his map. This picture is of Hyde Park Corner. Do you see in the right-hand corner a man with a wheel at the end of two handles? The wheel measures 8 feet 3 inches round the circumference, that is all round the edge, and as the man walks along the machine records how many times the wheel turns. So he has only to multiply that by the circumference to see how far he has gone.

Now we will take a walk round London two hundred years ago.

A WALK ROUND THE TOWN

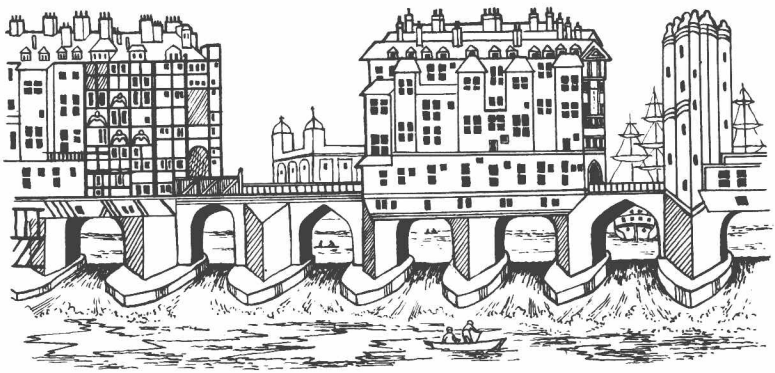
We get down from the coach or waggon in which we have travelled up from the country to find ourselves, one morning in 1760, in the busy courtyard of the George Inn at Southwark. Coaches drive in and out under the archway, horses and riders come and go, and there is bustle everywhere. The grooms and *ostlers* see to the horses and baggage, and coachmen call to their passengers to make ready while the landlord and his servants hurry to and fro to see that their guests are comfortable.

Here is a fine picture of the George Inn:

From this inn and others like it, people set out on their journeys from London to the south, or they arrived here from as far off as the West Country. Many inns had the picturesque *galleries* you can see, some of them decorated with plants and creepers. Strolling players performed their plays in the courtyard while the audience sat in the galleries. These inns were like our railway stations, for everyone travelled by coach or rode on horseback and the

inns provided suitable starting-places and rest-houses on the way for the stage-coaches which carried people to and from London.

When we leave the courtyard of the George Inn, we are on our way to the City, over London Bridge. You will be surprised as you step on to the bridge, for it is not just a simple road across the River Thames, as our bridges are today. It looks more like a street. Coaches and carts, and people walking on either side without any pavement, make the bridge very crowded. There are houses built on each side of the bridge and the road between them is barely twenty feet wide. But the houses are in very bad repair and big arches of strong timber have sometimes been built from the top of one house right across the road to the top of the one opposite, to keep them up. In fact an Act of Parliament has just been passed, providing for the removal of these tumble-down houses on the bridge. This is how the houses looked on the bridge:



If we stand where one of the houses has already been pulled down, we can watch the boats on the river. The many arches hold up the current of the river so much that it is a skilled business to 'shoot' the arches to the lower level of the water below. Many people travel by water. Rich men own barges, and there are hundreds of *watermen*, who earn their living by ferrying people up and down the river for a shilling or two, and delivering all sorts of goods.

We could stand here all day and watch the people and the traffic, but there is so much to see that we had better go on. We will walk up Gracechurch Street and then down Thames Street. Here there are busy merchants hurrying along, shopkeepers showing their wares, and all the street-traders whose cries we are beginning to know by now. This is what we see in Gracechurch Street:

Can you see the shop signs hanging over the doors to tell us what kind of a shop each one is? And can you see the man driving his sheep and cows to market? Perhaps he's going to Leadenhall market, which is still a market today, though there is far too much traffic to take animals to market this way in London now.

Can you see the posts along the road by the side of the shops? There is no pavement, so these posts safeguard walkers from the danger of being knocked down by carriages. You can also tie the reins of your horse to one of these posts to make sure your horse does not wander away while you go into a house or shop.

As we go along you will notice that the streets are very dusty and dirty compared with the streets of today. There is mud and rubbish everywhere, for there are no dustbins to be regularly emptied; people just throw everything into the street. Be careful you don't slip on an old cabbage leaf or a piece of fish skin! There is a narrow trench called a *kennel* running down the centre of most streets. This is supposed to carry away the rainwater, but it is always choked with mud and rubbish, so you can imagine how smelly the streets become in hot weather.

There are crowds of people here in the City going about their daily business—but there are many beggars too, for there are a great many very poor people in London, and the parish does not give them much help. Two hundred years ago a man who was out of work or ill would starve unless some charity gave him food, and widows and orphans often had a very hard life. There are some very bad slums in this old London too, and some districts where no respectable person dares to set foot after dark. Though there are lanterns in the streets at night, we

should think their light dim compared with present-day street-lighting.

Have you noticed the people who seem to be reciting verses and who try to get you to buy one of the papers they are waving in their hands? These are the *Ballad*-mongers. Whenever something particular happens in London, such as the execution of a well-known highwayman or the arrival of an important person from abroad, the ballad-mongers quickly print a ballad about it and sell it in the street.

Now we have reached London's wonderful cathedral. See how the dome rises above the houses of London:

Old St. Paul's was burned down during the Great Fire of 1666, and this fine new building was built on its ruins by Sir Christopher Wren. It is still new to the Londoners of two hundred years ago, for the last stone of the great building was laid only forty years before in 1710. Its magnificent dome rides high above the City with the golden cross sparkling in the sunlight.

St. Paul's is the Londoner's chief place of worship, used for all special services, royal occasions, and national thanksgivings, and there is a fine choir. Many people visit the cathedral to hear the music of Purcell, Byrd or Handel. You will learn more about Handel later on in this book. However, a good many people go to St. Paul's not to worship or listen to the music, but simply to gossip and meet their friends. For the nave of the great cathedral—that is, the wide centre part stretching from the west door to the portion beneath the circular dome—is used as a meeting-place and a promenade.

This picture shows you what the nave of St. Paul's looked like:

There are no chairs in the nave and you can see the people walking up and down. We should think it rather irreverent these days to use a church as a place to meet and exchange news with your friends, but in the eighteenth century nobody thought it at all odd. Londoners have always been very proud of their beautiful cathedral; and from the gallery outside the dome you get a magnificent view of London. Inside the dome there is the famous Whispering Gallery. If you stand on one side and whisper a message to the wall, your friend on the opposite side—a distance of 107 feet—can hear every word quite clearly. If you can visit St. Paul's you must not forget to climb up to the Whispering Gallery.

From St. Paul's Cathedral we walk down Ludgate Hill and at the bottom cross the Fleet bridge over the Fleet Ditch, a stream that runs into the Thames (but which in twentieth-century London has long since disappeared from sight into a *sewer*). This brings us into Fleet Street, leaving behind us on the right the gloomy Fleet Prison for people who cannot pay their debts. We walk under Temple Bar, where the City ends, and into the Strand. Here there are some very fine houses. In the picture below we have just walked under the archway of Temple Bar.