

'Magnificent'  
*Sunday Telegraph*

'Magisterial'  
*Daily Mail*

# JERRY WHITE

# LONDON

## IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



---

---

## CONTENTS

---

---

*Cover*  
*About the Book*  
*About the Author*  
*Also by Jerry White*  
*Illustrations*  
*List of Maps*  
*Dedication*  
*Title Page*  
*Epigraph*  
*Description*  
*Preface*  
*Introduction: London 1700–1708*

### PART ONE: City

I: James Gibbs's London, 1708–54  
*The Architect Most in Vogue: James Gibbs*  
*'A Kind of Monster': Growing London, 1720–54*  
*Obstructions and Inconveniences: Changing London, 1700–54*

II: Robert Adam's London, 1754–99  
*'A Kind of Revolution': Robert Adam*  
*'We Have Done Great Things': Improving London, 1754–99*  
*The Mad Spirit of Building: London Growing, 1754–99*  
*'An Epitome of a Great Nation': London, 1799*

## PART TWO: People

### III: Samuel Johnson's London – Britons

*'London is Their North-Star': Provincial Londoners*

*'Men Very Fit for Business': North Britons*

*'Within the Sound of Bow Bell': Cockneys and Citizens*

*'A Very Neat First Floor': Living and Dying*

*'Take or Give the Wall': Getting on Together*

### IV: Ignatius Sancho's London – Citizens of the World

*'Our Unfortunate Colour': Black Londoners*

*'Foreign Varlets': Europeans and Some Others*

*'Offscourings of Humanity': Jewish Londoners*

*'Get Up, You Irish Papist Bitch': Irish Londoners*

## PART THREE: Work

### V: William Beckford's London – Commerce

*'That Which Makes London to be London': Trade*

*'Most Infamous Sett of Gamblers': Money Matters*

*'They Swim into the Shops by Shoals': Retail*

*'Clean Your Honour's Shoes': Streets*

### VI: Francis Place's London – Industry and Labour

*'Minute Movement and Miraculous Weight': Made in London*

*Fellowship Porters, Lumpers and Scuffle-Hunters: Moving Things Around*

*High Life Below Stairs: Domestic Service*

*'At the Eve of a Civil War': Masters and Men*

### VII: Eliza Haywood's London – Print, Pictures and the Professions

*'Purse-Proud Title-Page Mongers': The Business of Words*

*'Overburdened with Practitioners': Print and the Professions*

*'Painting from Beggars': The Business of Pictures*

PART FOUR: Culture

VIII: Teresa Cornelys's London – Public Pleasures

*'High Lords, Deep Statesmen, Dutchesses and Whores':  
Carlisle House*

*'Down on Your Knees': The Stage*

*'Sights and Monsters': The Lions of London*

*No Equal in Europe: Pleasure Gardens*

*'Too Busy with Madam Geneva': Drinking and Socialising*

*'This Extravagant Itch of Gaming'*

IX: Martha Stracey's London – Prostitution

*'How Do You Do Brother Waterman?': Prostitutes*

*'The Whoring Rage Came Upon Me': Men and Prostitution*

*'Damn Your Twenty Pound Note': Fashion and Vice*

X: Mary Young's London – Crime and Violence

*The Republic of Thieves: Plebeian Crime*

*Virtue Overborn by Temptation: Genteel Crime*

*'Save Me Woody': Violence*

PART FIVE: Power

XI: The Fieldings' London – Police, Prison and Punishment

*Mr Fielding's Men: Thief-Takers*

*'Pluck Off Your Hat Before the Constable': The Parish Police*

*'Hell in Epitome': Prison*

*'Low Lived, Blackguard Merry-Making': Public  
Punishments*

XII: Jonas Hanway's London – Religion and Charity

*Fear of God and Proper Subjection: Charity*

*Nurseries of Religion, Virtue and Industry: Governing the Poor*

*'To Resest y<sup>e</sup> World y<sup>e</sup> Flesh and y<sup>e</sup> Devell': Religion*

*'No Hanoverian, No Presbyterian': Religion and Politics, 1700-59*

XIII: John Wilkes's London - Politics and Government

*'Wilkes and Liberty!' 1760-68*

*'Life-Blood of the State': City versus Court, 1768-79*

*Not a Prison Standing: The Gordon Riots, 1780*

*'I Would Have No King': Revolution and Democracy, 1780-99*

*Afterword*

*Picture Section*

*Notes*

*Acknowledgements*

*Bibliography*

*Index*

*Copyright*



---

---

## ABOUT THE BOOK

---

---

**London in the eighteenth century was a city that had risen from the ashes.**

The city and its people had been brought to the brink by the Great Fire of 1666. But the century that followed was a period of vigorous expansion, of scientific and artistic genius, of blossoming reason, civility, elegance and manners. It was also an age of extremes: of starving poverty and exquisite fashion, of joy and despair, of sentiment and cruelty.

In Jerry White's acclaimed history of London's magnificent and boisterous rebirth we witness the astonishing drama of daily life in the midst of this burgeoning city.

---

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

---

Professor Jerry White teaches London history at Birkbeck, University of London and has been writing about the city for over thirty years. His *London in the Twentieth Century* won the Wolfson History Prize in 2001, and was followed by *London in the Nineteenth Century* in 2007.

His more recent books include *Zeppelin Nights*, a social history of London during the First World War, and *Mansions of Misery: A Biography of the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison*. He was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature by the University of London in 2005 and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

---

---

ALSO BY JERRY WHITE

---

---

*London in the Twentieth Century:  
A City and Its People*

*London in the Nineteenth Century:  
A Human Awful Wonder of God*

*Mansions of Misery:  
A Biography of the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison*

*Zeppelin Nights:  
London in the First World War*

*Rothschild Buildings:  
Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1820*

*Campbell Bunk:  
The Worst Street in North London Between the Wars*



---

---

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

---

- [1](#) James Gibbs, *c.*1747, after William Hogarth
- [2](#) Robert Adam, *c.*1765, after a portrait in the RIBA
- [3](#) Samuel Johnson, *c.*1780, after Sir Joshua Reynolds
- [4](#) Ignatius Sancho, *c.*1770, after Thomas Gainsborough
- [5](#) William Beckford, engraving of the Guildhall monument, 1772
- [6](#) Francis Place, 1836, after a sketch by Daniel Maclise
- [7](#) Eliza Haywood, *c.*1728, engraved by George Vertue after James Parmentier
- [8](#) Teresa Cornelys, *c.*1765, artist unknown
- [9](#) The Young Wanton, *c.*1770, published by Carrington Bowles
- [10](#) Brothel Thieves, 1735, William Hogarth, *The Rake's Progress*, Pl. III
- [11](#) Henry Fielding, *c.*1749, after William Hogarth, and Sir John Fielding, *c.*1762, after Nathaniel Hone
- [12](#) Jonas Hanway, *c.*1780, after James Bretherton
- [13](#) John Wilkes Esq., 1763, William Hogarth

---

---

## LIST OF MAPS

---

---

[London in 1723](#)

[London in 1790](#)

[Strand, Fleet Street, 1761](#)

[Westminster, 1761](#)

[City and the Upper Port, 1761](#)

[St Clement Danes to Charing Cross, c.1799](#)

[Fleet Street to St Paul's Churchyard, c.1740](#)

[Soho, 1761](#)

[Covent Garden and Drury Lane, c.1795](#)

[Chick Lane, c.1740](#)

[Covent Garden, c.1740](#)

[Bloomsbury, 1761](#)

[Westminster to St George's Fields, 1790](#)

For John Hodgkins and Paul Wilsdon-Tagg,  
eighteenth-century men both

# LONDON IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*A Great and Monstrous Thing*

JERRY WHITE



THE BODLEY HEAD  
London

‘... it will, I believe, be allowed to be agreeable and sufficient to touch at those Things principally, which no other Authors have yet mentioned, concerning this great and monstrous Thing, called *London*.’

Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 2 vols., 1724-26, Vol. I, p. 325

## **A Description of London**

Houses, Churches, mix'd together;  
Streets, unpleasant in all Weather;  
Prisons, Palaces, contiguous;  
Gates; a Bridge; the THAMES irriguous.

Gaudy Things enough to tempt ye;  
Showy Outsides; Insides empty;  
Bubbles, Trades, mechanic Arts;  
Coaches, Wheelbarrows, and Carts.

Warrants, Bailiffs, Bills unpaid;  
Lords of Laundresses afraid;  
Rogues that nightly rob and shoot Men;  
Hangmen, Aldermen, and Footmen.

Lawyers, Poets, Priests, Physicians;  
Noble, Simple, all Conditions:  
Worth beneath a threadbare Cover;  
Villainy - bedaub'd all over.

Women, black, red, fair, and gray;  
Prudes, and such as never pray;  
Handsome, ugly, noisy, still;  
Some that will not, some that will.

Many a Beau without a Shilling;  
Many a Widow not unwilling;  
Many a Bargain, if you strike it:

This is LONDON! How d'ye like it?

John Bancks, 1738



---

---

## PREFACE

---

---

ON TUESDAY 13 June 1732, after some days of eager anticipation, the pillory had finally been carted from Newgate and assembled by carpenters at Seven Dials. It was to receive John Waller, convicted of perjury, attempting to swear away men's lives for crimes they had never committed so he might profit from the rewards. He was the pretended 'victim' or key witness in no fewer than six prosecutions for highway robbery at the Old Bailey between 1722 and 1732 in which two persons were condemned to death. Not all his victims were virtuous, because one was the notorious James Dalton, leader for a number of years of one of the most active gangs of street robbers in London, who was duly hanged on Waller's evidence in 1730. Waller was sentenced to stand at Seven Dials and then, some days later, outside Hicks's Hall, the magistrates' court at Clerkenwell. He would never keep that second appointment.

No one was more loathsome to the London crowd than an informer. John Waller must have known what fury he would face when he was brought out of Redgate's alehouse in King Street (now Neal Street) for the short walk to the pillory. When he appeared on the platform he was met by a storm of missiles so fierce that the officers were unable to fasten the block. As they struggled to get his head in the pillory several men rushed the platform, among them Edward Dalton, brother of the man hanged by Waller's testimony. Waller was caught by one arm in the pillory but

his head was yanked free from the block. He was 'stripped as naked as he was born, except his Feet, for they pulled his Stockings over his Shoes and so left them; then they beat him with Collyflower-stalks', pulled his hand from the pillory and punched, kicked and stamped on him as he lay on the platform. A chimneysweep forced soot into his mouth and it was rammed down his throat with a cauliflower or artichoke stalk. Someone slashed him 'quite down the Back' with a knife. The excitement was such that the pillory was pulled over, spilling Waller and his assailants onto the stones. 'Waller then lay naked on the Ground. Dalton got upon him, and stamping on his Privy Parts, he gave a dismal Groan, and I believe it was his last; for after that I never heard him groan nor speak, nor saw him stir.'

Waller's body was taken in a hackney coach to the St Giles Roundhouse where a surgeon pronounced him dead, and then back to Newgate. All the way, an exultant cheering crowd followed the coach. Among them were Edward Dalton and Richard Griffith, a meat porter who 'took particular Pleasure in mobbing and pelting Persons appointed to stand upon the Pillory' and who had been prominent in beating Waller to death. At the door of Newgate the prison authorities refused for some time to take the body in until ordered to do so by the Sheriffs. During the delay, Waller's mother, who had been anxiously awaiting her son's return, entered the coach. 'There was a Man in the Coach, and they put me in, and I laid my Son's Head in my Lap ... My Son had neither Eyes, nor Ears, nor Nose to be seen; they had squeezed his Head flat. *Griffith* pull'd open the Coach-door, and struck me, pull'd my Son's Head out of my Lap, and his Brains fell into my Hand.'<sup>[fn1](#)</sup>

The terrible antagonisms leading to the death of John Waller remind us that London in the eighteenth century was a divided city. Its divisions overlapped one another at many levels. Old separations between London, Westminster

and Southwark were still marked physically on the ground, adding to the difficulties of getting round the metropolis. It was a city divided by politics and history, fractures especially deep between the City of London and the court and parliament at Westminster. It was a place of religious discord between churchmen and dissenters and between Protestants and Catholics. The public spheres of men and women were separate in part, their private relations frequently marked by violence and exploitation. Neighbourhoods might be riven by ethnic tensions and family affronts. And everything was complicated by class, for the divide between rich and poor in London was never greater or more destructive in the modern era than in these years. At times these divisions were such that London could seem at war with itself: for a week in June 1780 it really was. There are many narratives that can be constructed from this dramatic, turbulent and disordered century in London's history, but one powerful theme will be how and to what extent the Londoners and their city healed these open wounds.

The fashions of history-writing have swung in recent years towards a celebration of the English eighteenth century as an age of artistic and scientific genius, of reason, civility, elegance and manners. It has often been summarised as the Age of Politeness. And when we think of England in this century it is really London we have in mind, for London led the nation in genius, elegance and manners to an overwhelming degree. There is a great deal of truth in this characterisation, but a proper balance needs to be struck. For this was a city (and an Age) of starving poverty as well as shining polish, a city of civility and a city of truculence, a city of decorum and a city of lewdness, a city of joy and a city of despair, a city of sentiment and a city of cruelty. We might truthfully summarise it as a city of extremes. In Daniel Defoe's epigram of the early 1720s, London really was 'this great and monstrous Thing'.

In transcribing original texts I have followed the originals, with all their eccentricities of spelling, punctuation, italics and capitalisation and without disrupting the flow with innumerable '*sics*'. The reader will have to trust me that Joshua Reynolds really did write of the 'Prince of Whales', that a newspaper advert really did refer to a baby's 'Shoos', and so on.

Dates given before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 are given in the old style, except that I have made the year begin on 1 January rather than 25 March, as was frequently the case at the time. It is a most disconcerting thing to find a newspaper for 31 December 1705 followed by the issue of 1 January 1705; I have avoided the device of 1 January 1705/06 and given the year as 1706.

Pressures of length have required economy in the endnotes. I have used short titles throughout, with full titles given in the bibliography at the end of the book. And I have confined the notes generally to sources for direct quotations, surprising facts, and some limited suggestions for further reading.

Translating money into modern values is fraught with difficulty. For much of the eighteenth century a regular income – hardly ever attainable, I should add – of 75p a week (say £40 a year) would provide security and reasonable comfort for a family of man, woman and two children; a pound a week would be considered good money for anyone working with their hands, even a junior clerk; and a gentleman could manage to keep up a decent appearance on £200 a year. If we have in mind a multiplier of 250 to translate old values into new we won't go too far wrong.

12d (pence) = 1s (shilling) = 5p

Half a crown = 2s 6d = 12.5p

Crown = 5s = 25p

240d = 20s = £1  
½ guinea = 10s 6d = 52.5p  
1 guinea = 21s = £1.05p  
1 moidore = 27s = £1.35p

[fn1](#) *Daily Journal* 14 June 1732. Dalton and Griffith were both hanged for Waller's murder.

---

---

## INTRODUCTION: LONDON 1700-1708

---

---

LONDON IS GENERALLY believed, not only to be one of the most Ancient, but the most Spacious, Populous, Rich, Beautiful, Renowned and Noble Citys that we know of at this day in the World: 'Tis the Seat of the *British* Empire, the Exchange of *Great Britain* and *Ireland*; the Compendium of the Kingdom, the Vitals of the Common-wealth, and the Principal Town of Traffic that I can find accounted for by any of our Geographers ...<sup>1</sup>

By 1700, after half a century of relentless expansion, London had overtaken Paris to become the largest – if disputably the finest – city in Europe. It stretched in a great arc of continuous building along the north bank of the Thames, some five miles as the crow flies from Tothill Street, Westminster, to Limehouse in the east. It was linked to the south bank and the burgeoning Borough of Southwark – the next largest town in the kingdom if it could ever have been imagined separate from the metropolis – by the 500-year-old London Bridge. The connection seemed more solid somehow when travellers mistook it for just another street until a gap in the houses on either side revealed the swirling river below. North to south, across that single bridge, London was more shallow than broad, just two and a half miles from the 'stones' end' in Shoreditch to the furthest point of Blackman Street, Southwark. This was a walkable city, just three hours

across (allowing for obstructions) and less than two hours north to south, and on foot was how most Londoners experienced it. Even so, its size and complexity and dense obscurities already made it unknowable: 'So large is the Extent of *London, Westminster* and *Southwark*, with their Suburbs and Liberties, that no Coachman nor Porter knows every Place in them ...'<sup>2</sup>

That age-old three-part division of 'London', dating back to Saxon times at least, was still real enough at the beginning of the eighteenth century, despite the unbroken continuity of the built-up area. The City of London, the heart of trade, manufacturing and the manipulation of money, had centuries before burst beyond its Roman walls, but confined itself to ancient boundaries east of Temple Bar and west of the Tower. The City of Westminster had two sectors: one around the Abbey, Westminster Hall (the law courts) and the Houses of Parliament, and the other – more aristocratic – around St James's Palace, the royal court. This area around St James's, with its northern suburbs, was just becoming known as 'the west end of the town'. By 1700 the two cities were conjoined by houses and streets almost a mile deep from the river to their outer suburbs and liberties. These outliers in effect formed a township distinct from the cities out of which they had grown, made of once separate villages now fused in a solid ring from St Martin-in-the-Fields in the west to Whitechapel in the east. This ring of suburbs, though highly diverse, was predominantly a workers' district. South of the river, Southwark also had a strong manufacturing complexion, leavened with trade and something of the City's money-getting ways. In the east, on both sides of the river, was an entirely different London, a seafarer's town or towns, places of both poverty and considerable wealth. Seagoing London was most dense along the river's north bank at Wapping, but it had a significant strand along the south bank from Bermondsey, through Rotherhithe, to the quite



separate towns of Deptford and Greenwich – neither, in 1700, London at all.

Despite frequent allusions to the cities of London and Westminster and the Borough of Southwark as three distinct places, and despite there being in reality five main divisions, the whole had come to be known and understood as ‘London’ by 1700. Distinctions, though, remained more than skin deep. Joseph Addison famously summed them up in June 1712:

When I consider this great city in its several quarters and divisions, I look upon it as an aggregate of various nations distinguished from each other by their respective customs, manners, and interests. The courts of two countries do not so much differ from one another, as the court and city, in their peculiar ways of life and conversation. In short, the inhabitants of St James’s, notwithstanding they live under the same laws, and speak the same language, are a distinct people from those of Cheapside, who are likewise removed from those of the Temple on one side, and those of Smithfield on the other, by several climates and degrees in their ways of thinking and conversing together.<sup>3</sup>

How many lived in this ‘aggregate of various nations’? If only we could answer with confidence. All numbers in eighteenth-century London are to be treated with scepticism, most mistrusted, many dismissed out of hand. Contemporary estimates of London’s population around 1700 helpfully ranged from around half a million to 2 million. Historians since have been hardly the wiser. The two most eminent London historians of the first half of the twentieth century adopted astonishingly precise figures of 674,500 for 1700 and 676,750 for 1750. A kind of consensus around 575,000 for 1700 and 750,000 for 1750 has emerged in the last fifty years, but the true figures are unknowable and these will only ever stand as best guesses.

If we keep in our minds over half a million for 1700 and under three-quarters of a million for 1750 we won't go too far wrong. Even so, the staggering size for contemporaries of London's population at the beginning of the century is brought home by the estimate for Britain's second city in 1700. That was Bristol, at around 30,000. It is believed that one in ten persons in England and Wales lived in London; and that perhaps one in six had lived in it at some time in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Just why London's 'nations' proved so populous is an easier question to answer than how many Londoners there were. Its sheer size exercised a gravitational pull on the nation, through wonderment and curiosity and tales retold; and through counties from Cornwall to Cumberland producing and delivering goods for the London market and providing labour-power for every function from serving maid to courtier. London was the kingdom's centre of world trade and shipping, of the emerging banking, brokerage and insurance industries, of finished commodity manufacture not only for the metropolis but for the nation, for European competitors, for the empire and for the world. It was the home of the royal court, with its countless civil-list pensioners; of Parliament, which transacted an immense part of not just public, but local and even private business for the nation; and of uniquely metropolitan institutions like the higher law courts, a monopoly of printing and publishing, and the 'royal' theatres. For all these reasons London was immensely wealthy. And that in itself was a further irresistible allure to rich and poor alike, ever supplementing the 'aggregate of various nations'.

A striking feature of this monster city in 1700 was its newness. In September 1666 some three-fifths of the City of London had been destroyed in the Great Fire. The losses were immense – 13,200 houses were burned to the ground and so were most of the great public buildings, including St Paul's Cathedral and eighty-seven parish churches.

Rebuilding the housing took well into the 1670s. The public buildings took longer – St Paul's was not considered finished till 1711. And rebuilding was at a much reduced density – some parish churches and livery company halls were never replaced and only around 9,000 houses filled the place of those lost.

Although some lamented a failure to reconstruct the City on rational geometric lines, a different and doubtless improved City nonetheless replaced the old. The new houses were of brick rather than plaster-faced timber as before. They had neat flat fronts, were generally two rooms deep, three or four main floors high, and two or three windows (or 'bays') wide. Attics were set back into the roofline and there were no storeys jutting forward over the pavement, nearly brushing gables with the houses across the way. Old property boundaries had generally been followed. But where opportunity offered, main roads were widened and courts and alleys were opened out, and gradients were flattened when the Thames waterfront was raised three feet. So in 1700, three-fifths of what had been an ancient City, full of Tudor buildings and older, was now a great modern town, just thirty years old or less.<sup>5</sup>

Almost equally important, the Fire had given an added push to suburban development in and around Westminster, as the wealthiest citizens took the chance to seek a convenient home downwind of, but close to, the crowded City. St James's Square's first houses were rated from 1667 and the neighbourhood south of Piccadilly grew apace from then. Great old mansions along the riverside south of the Strand were pulled down and replaced with elegant rows of terraced houses in York Buildings and neighbouring streets from the 1670s. The area around the Haymarket and Leicester Fields (later Square) was also built on from the 1670s, Soho in the 1670s and 80s, Golden Square and around in the 1680s, Seven Dials in the 1690s. In north London, smart suburbs took root around Red Lion Square

and at Bloomsbury Square from the 1680s. There was expansion at the same time in some middling and poor parishes at the edge of Westminster and the City, in St Martin-in-the-Fields and St Giles and in Clerkenwell. Further east were new streets in Spitalfields, driven by demand from French Protestant migrants especially from 1685, and in Wapping. Finally, south of the river, the Great Fire of Southwark of 1676 destroyed 600 houses, which were rebuilt in the new brick or in traditional timber and plaster. All this, then, was pretty much spanking new or just coming of age in 1700. Indeed, the up-to-date feel of much of London was a matter of astonishment, its new growth 'really a kind of Prodigy', according to Daniel Defoe.<sup>6</sup>

There was much of charm and beauty in this new London. Contemporary Britons believed it 'the fairest' city 'in all Europe, perhaps in the whole World'. Part of that claim resided in the majesty of old buildings like the Tower and, most of all, Westminster Abbey: rising over the trees of the park, 'with another city arising beyond all', it offered 'a view of such a nature as few places in the world can parallel'. But much was contributed by what was new. The warm pinks and reds of the brick used to build the new City and suburbs were not supplanted by a cooler grey until towards the end of Queen Anne's reign (1714). In paintings of the time and for half a century after, the muted fireside glow of London brick cast the city in a rosy hue. It seems to have proved more resilient to discolouration from London smoke than white Portland stone, used for every grand public building and quickly blackened on the south and west façades by the prevailing winds.<sup>7</sup>

It was not just the welcoming colours of new London that gratified contemporaries, but the regularity of the street frontages in the City and of the streets themselves in many of the newer suburbs. Grandeur too could be found in the new public buildings of the City, in the rebuilt churches

wrought or influenced by Sir Christopher Wren, fifty or so gleaming steeples and towers in Portland stone, some soaring 100 feet and more over the buildings around them. Grandest of all was the new cathedral of St Paul's, Wren's masterpiece, massively dominating the City skyline from its elevated position atop Ludgate Hill. Its inspiration – no accident this, given the frequent comparisons between the celestial city and London – was St Peter's at Rome. The cupola of St Paul's stretched some 300 feet into the sky. It would remain London's tallest building for more than 200 years to come, helping strangers find their bearings by a glimpse of the dome over the housetops. Even so, its magnificence was curtailed by London's inherent claustrophobia and the close clustering of buildings around it: 'we can't see it till we are upon it,' wrote one critic, who called for the demolition of the nearby City gate and the opening of a line of view from St Paul's to the river to show its full glory.<sup>8</sup>

This cramped confinement was at its worst in the remnants of old London that had escaped the Fire. These were extensive. Two-fifths of the City represented probably 5,000 houses and other buildings, not all old because of London's ceaseless rebuilding and refashioning but many dating back to the 1400s and many more to the century of Elizabeth and Shakespeare. Not even all these were necessarily bad and not all the old streets were uniformly poor and shabby. But much of this pre-Fire housing in the City was worn and decrepit from generations of multiple occupancy and landlord neglect. The wards of Farringdon Without (or outside the walls) and Cripplegate Without contained much of the worst housing in the old City, with over 300 courts and alleys between them. The former included part of Chick Lane and Fleet Lane near the Fleet Ditch, and Long Lane, Smithfield, all bywords for filth and dangerous disorder. Small enclaves of the worn-out City were dotted here and there, like the Liberty of St Martin's-

le-Grand, and the former 'Alsatia' or ancient thieves' and debtors' sanctuary of Whitefriars between Fleet Street and the Thames.

Beyond the City, swathes of the inner suburbs from Charing Cross to Whitechapel pre-dated the Fire. The courts and alleys between St Martin's Lane and Bedfordbury were so interlocking and obscure, so much a law unto themselves, that they were known as the Bermudas or the Carribbee Islands from the early seventeenth century. The narrow streets of St Giles were notoriously poor, filthy and dangerous. Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell, was the archetypal London slum long before the word was invented, its name thrown casually into conversation as symbolising the very lowest of London low life. Names like Rotten Row, Foul Lane, Ragged Row, Dark Entry, Dirty Lane, Pissing Alley ('a very proper name for it') litter the London maps of the time around Long Acre and Drury Lane, Shoreditch and Whitechapel.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Southwark was as bad as anywhere, the courts and alleys off Bankside 'very meanly built and Inhabited', the Mint (another Alsatia, west of the high street) 'sorry built with old Timber Houses, and as ill Inhabited', and Kent Street, the main road to Dover, very dirty, narrow and mean, with courts of 'old sorry Timber Houses'. But most embarrassing of all was old Westminster. Here, around the Abbey, the law courts and the Houses of Parliament, were densely clustered wooden sheds and hovels, even leaning against the Abbey walls. Some were 'ready to fall'. King Street, the main road from the court and City to Parliament, was a narrow filthy congested way, an affront and obstruction to the Queen and her burgesses. This whole wretched area around the Abbey was known as 'the desert of Westminster'. Its outlook wasn't improved by the extensive blackened remains of the Tudor Whitehall Palace, burned to the ground in January 1698 and still largely undeveloped in the early years of the century.<sup>10</sup>



Throughout this old London, some obscure places had no name at all, outliving any claim to inheritance or title. They were run as fiefdoms by the occupiers until so knocked about they were abandoned altogether, the odd 'backward Place, which now, thro' Time, or other Casualties, is come to Desolation, and has at this Day nothing but Ruins, to shew it was once the Possession of poor Inhabitants'. Houses there and elsewhere frequently collapsed. Indeed, much of old London seemed tottering on the verge. Small wonder that after the Great Storm of November 1703, 'Houses looked like falling scaffolding, like skeletons of buildings, like what in truth they were, heaps of ruins.'<sup>11</sup>

It was this old London that was primarily responsible for the great inconveniences of metropolitan life. Here the streets were generally surfaced with large pebbles and with a central kennel or gutter, at very best uneven and rough. Main streets had footways on either side paved in flat stone, Purbeck stone the preferred material, and were not raised much - if at all - above the roadway. To stop carriages taking advantage of the smooth stones they were protected by stumpy wooden posts at the pavement's edge. But in narrow streets there was no footway and no protection at all for the pedestrian. In any event, the upkeep of pavement and carriageway was the responsibility of the separate occupiers - not even the owners - of houses on each side up to the central kennel or midpoint. It was a duty much neglected. Where undertaken, it was performed as cheaply as possible. No obligation existed to use the same materials, or even repair to the same level, as one's neighbour. The pits and troughs that wheeled traffic had to negotiate were bone-shaking and axle-shattering; the holes and hazards endured by foot passengers were not just prejudicial to bones but to life itself. Stagecoach passengers encountering 'London stones' from the country 'were jumbled about like so many *Pease* in a *Childs-Rattle*,



running, at every Kennel-Jolt, a great Hazard of a Dislocation ... Our Elbows and Shoulders ... Black and Blew'. The 800 hackney coaches licensed for hire were better sprung apparently than the stages, but even they were teeth-rattlers.<sup>12</sup>

There were other hazards too. The drainage of London in 1700 was established on a simple system. Common 'shores' or sewers, often Thames tributaries like the Fleet River or 'Ditch', were intended for surface water drainage only. On this optimistic assumption, the Fleet had been canalised in the 1670s below Holborn Bridge to the Thames and lined with warehouses on either side. Using sewers for foul drainage, for human waste, say, or blood from the slaughterhouses, was unlawful. Human waste was stored in cesspools, pits dug often directly beneath the 'bog-houses' or 'houses of office'. They had to be emptied in the hours of darkness to mitigate the nuisance, their contents or 'night soil' brought up by bucket and shovel and carted to the farmers' country dunghills, or to great pits in Tothill Fields, Westminster, and elsewhere.

In fact these systems were separate in name only. Nightmen took the risk of a fine and tipped their carts in the common sewers to save a tedious journey to the fields. Those with properties alongside the sewers built their bog-houses over them with impunity, or nearly so. Londoners urinated openly in the streets and defecated more privately on the stones of courts and alleys. Chamber pots were emptied into the kennels, which in any event collected the scourings of the streets, the horse and cattle dung, the dog shit and animal carcasses, and shot them into the sewers:

Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and  
Blood,  
Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in  
Mud,