



Period 2: London in the Enlightenment (1660–1780)

INTRODUCTION

This Introduction, dealing inevitably with the Restoration, the Great Plague and the Great Fire (and the subsequent rebuilding of the City), considers this period as the beginning of the transformation of London into the great commercial, financial and imperial capital it became in the nineteenth century, with the development of great public buildings like new St Paul’s Cathedral and the rebuilt Royal Exchange, the establishment of broad thoroughfares, public parks and fashionable districts such as Mayfair, and the foundation of the Royal Society and (later) the British Museum. It was the new Royal Exchange and the unprecedented founding of the Bank of England that marked the emergence of London as the hub of global capitalism that it still is, generating a flood of money into the economy that seemed to some contemporaries to be a channel of moral corruption, as exemplified by the South Sea Bubble, an early manifestation of what has recently been termed “irrational exuberance” in the stock market. It is no coincidence that this period saw a rapid growth in legislative concern with crimes of property, and the introduction ends with a consideration of crime and punishment in Georgian London, and its somewhat ambivalent treatment in the literature of the time.

In the spring of 1660, after eleven grey years of the Puritan Commonwealth, King Charles II re-entered London in triumph: he was greeted, according to the diarist John Evelyn, by the army “brandishing their swords and shouting with inexpressible joy; the ways strewed with flowers, the bells ringing, the streets hung with tapestry, fountains running with wine; the mayor, aldermen, and all the companies in their liveries, chains of gold, and banners; lords and nobles clad in cloth of silver, gold, and velvet; the windows and balconies well set with ladies; trumpets, music, and myriads of

people” [2.3]. Charles and his new court brought with them a relaxation of the puritanical rigour of the Commonwealth [2.5–2.6] and a return of theatre to London, with a new kind of elegant, witty, sophisticated prose comedy, influenced by Molière, in the work of writers like Wycherley and Congreve, and a (more regrettable) taste for bombastic tragedies in heroic couplets.

If Shakespeare had somehow lived to see the Restoration, he would have noticed great changes in the London he knew, which had doubled in size since 1600, spilling north and east over the Roman walls and westward into the space between the City and Westminster, “now with building so joined it makes up but one vast building [*conurbation*] with all its suburbs” [2.1]. A map of 1667 shows the city as a solid mass stretching from Whitechapel in the east to beyond Gray’s Inn in the west and up to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch in the north (all of them open country for Shakespeare). This relentless growth continued throughout the period: Defoe observed in 1724 that “We see several villages, formerly standing, as it were, in the country, and at a great distance, now joined to the streets by continued buildings, and more making haste to meet in the like manner; for example, Deptford” [2.2]. After the centuries-long monopoly of London Bridge (itself widened in 1758–1762 by the demolition of its houses) it was found necessary to build three new bridges across the Thames in this period, which encouraged the development of the city south of the river: the wooden Putney Bridge¹ in 1729, and stone bridges at Westminster in 1750 and Blackfriars in 1760.

It was in this period, indeed, that London began to turn into the great commercial, financial and imperial capital it became in the nineteenth century, though its streets remained ill-lit at night till the end of the eighteenth (see [2.25]). The 1660s, for example, saw the first development of ever-fashionable Mayfair, which by the mid-eighteenth century had filled most of the space bounded by Regent St, Oxford St, Piccadilly and Park Lane with elegant Georgian houses and such coveted addresses as Berkeley Square, Hanover Square, Grosvenor Square and Burlington Gardens. Similarly, Charles II began the process of establishing one of the glories of modern central London, its public parks. At the restoration, Hyde Park,² which had been sold off by the Puritan government, was re-appropriated as a royal demesne, and became a hugely fashionable place to be seen walking or riding in fine weather. Charles also laid out the smaller nearby Green Park and (almost adjacent to Green Park) St James’s Park, both just north of Westminster; the latter was, like the Strand [2.26], well-known nocturnally as a place to pick up sex-workers. In the following century the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew were also laid out, with elegant classical temples, an Orangery and a Great

¹**Putney Bridge:** replaced by the current stone bridge in the 1880s; since 1845 it has represented the start of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.

²**Hyde Park:** 340 acres of open land to the north-west of Westminster, seized by Henry VIII from the monks of Westminster at the dissolution of the monasteries; it was originally used as a royal hunting-ground, and opened to the public in the early seventeenth century.

Pagoda, as were the fashionable pleasure gardens at Ranelagh, in Chelsea [2.21]; Wordsworth recalled hearing of

[...] green groves, and wilderness of lamps
 Dimming the stars, and fireworks magical,
 And gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes,
 Floating in dance, or warbling high in air
 The songs of spirits! (*The Prelude* 1850, 7.122–6; Wordsworth, 227)

Another harbinger of modernity was the establishment of the Royal Society in 1660, the first institution in the world devoted to experimental science [2.12 HN]; a hundred years later, in 1759, the British Museum and its library were opened to the public (though by application only) in Montagu House,³ Bloomsbury. The museum was founded on the proceeds of a public lottery (*plus ça change ...*), and its first exhibits comprised the large legacy of the collector Sir Hans Sloane and the purchased library of Robert Harley, 1st earl of Oxford.

In 1660, however, the swollen city was about to face a drastic—though temporary—reduction in its population. Because it was now so crowded, sanitation was even worse than it had been in Shakespeare’s day: Swift, some decades later, describes the foul refuse swept through the streets by a shower of rain, when “you’ll find the sink [*open sewer*] / Strike your offended sense with double stink” because “Sweepings from butchers’ stalls, dung, guts, and blood, / Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud, / Dead cats, and turnip-tops, come tumbling down the flood” [2.20]. This foetid squalor was a paradise for rats, and consequently for their fleas, which transmit through their bites the bacterium that causes bubonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*). In 1665–1666 a huge epidemic killed about 100,000 Londoners, or one in every four (see [2.7 HN]). The diarist Samuel Pepys chronicles something of the melancholy strangeness of the times, describing his “meeting dead corpses of the plague, carried to be buried close to me at noonday, through the City in Fenchurch Street” [2.7]. The rich and powerful fled the city, and Defoe recounts the way in which those who were left adapted to the everyday horror: “Sometimes a man or woman dropped down dead in the very markets; for many people that had the plague upon them knew nothing of it till the inward gangrene had affected their vitals and they died in a few moments. This caused that many died frequently in that manner in the streets suddenly, without any warning. [...] and] though at first the people would stop as they went along and call to the neighbours to come out on such an occasion, yet afterward no notice was taken of them” [2.8].⁴

³Montagu House: eventually proved too cramped for the expanding collection, and was gradually replaced during the first half of the C19th by the building we know, with its imposing classical portico.

⁴Defoe was a child in 1666, but he had access to first-hand accounts from his own family and others.

But the population, constantly reinforced by immigration both from the countryside and from the continent, soon recovered: less than ten years later it had climbed to half-a-million, and by the end of our period had doubled to some 800,000. The plague, however, was immediately followed by a calamity much less lethal but more radically transformative for the city: the Great Fire [2.9 HN]. Though only half-a-dozen deaths were officially recorded,⁵ among the great landmarks lost were old St Paul's Cathedral (a huge, somewhat run-down Gothic church—see [1.5]), dozens of city churches, and Gresham's Royal Exchange.

Though the more grandiose plans of completely redesigning the city on a grid pattern were never implemented, and something of the old labyrinth of laneways survived (see [2.18]), London arose from the ashes as in many ways a more modern city of brick and stone, with many broad streets and elegant squares: “before the Fire of London the streets were narrow and public edifices, as well as private, were more crowded, and built closer to one another” [2.11], although “so many great houses were converted into streets and courts, alleys and buildings, that there are, by estimation, almost 4000 houses now standing on the ground which the Fire left desolate, more than stood on the same ground before” (Defoe, *A Tour*; see [2.2 HN]). Fifty or so city churches were rebuilt in the modern grand style, the greatest of them being what Defoe called “a building exceeding beautiful and magnificent” (*A Tour*), St Paul's Cathedral [2.13 HN], with its splendid baroque west front and interior and its majestic lantern-topped dome [General Introduction, n.4]; it was the tallest building in London from its official completion in 1711 until the erection of the Post Office (now BT) Tower in the 1960s.

Most profound in their effects were the changes in the governance of England. One of the issues contested in the Civil War was the question of whether authority in the State came from God, through the King, or from the consent of the governed, mediated by Parliament, and despite the restoration of the monarchy, it was Parliament that finally won the day. Charles II had considerably less power than his father, and at the Glorious Revolution of 1688, his brother the Catholic James II was expelled and his niece, the Protestant Mary (together with her husband, William of Orange) was invited to take the throne as a limited monarch, explicitly subject to the law, in accordance with the Bill of Rights (1689). The Bill of Rights became the foundation of the constitutional monarchy that the United Kingdom still enjoys; it restricted the powers and prerogatives of the monarch and established certain freedoms for Parliament, including parliamentary privilege (the right to free speech within Parliament) and the right to determine all taxation and expenditure (previous Stuart monarchs had tried to govern without parliamentary involvement).

⁵It is probable, as historians have pointed out, that rather more deaths occurred than were recorded, given the likelihood that many elderly and infirm people may have been surprised and trapped in their homes by the conflagration, whose fierce wind-fanned temperatures (high enough to melt iron) would have annihilated their bodies.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744) in his mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock* (1714; Pope 1966, 86–109) pokes zeugmatic fun at the merely ceremonial function of the new kind of monarch: “Here Thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea” (*RL* 3.7–8; 96). At her court (as Pope depicts it) the aristocrats who under Elizabeth would have been involved in serious public duties now spend their time playing cards, drinking tea and gossiping, while “Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat, / With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that” (*RL* 3.17–8; 96).

The poem also offers a glimpse of the true source of power in this brave new world: as his heroine Belinda finishes her elaborate make-up routine in the late afternoon, “The Merchant from th’Exchange returns in peace” (*RL* 3.23; 96). He has spent the day profitably at the “sumptuous” newly rebuilt Royal Exchange (see [2.14 HN]), “a large space of ground enclosed round with cloisters and open arches on which are built many walks of shops of all trades. The middle space below was designed and is used for the merchants to meet to concert their business and trade and bills” [2.1]. This new Exchange marks the emergence of London as the hub of global capitalism that it still is, “making this metropolis a kind of emporium for the whole earth” where you may “hear disputes adjusted between an inhabitant of Japan and an alderman of London, or [...] see a subject of the Great Mogul entering into a league with one of the Czar of Muscovy” [2.14].⁶ Belinda’s dressing-table is furnished with the spoils of these exotic markets:

This casket India’s glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia⁷ breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transform’d to combs, the speckled and the white. (*RL* 1.133–6; 91)

The source of this confident new prosperity was, oddly enough, a series of naval defeats in the 1690s that had forced the government to overhaul and expand the Royal Navy. This was a massive task estimated to cost £1.2 million, perhaps £2.5 billion in 2018 money.⁸ Having neither the cash nor the market credit to raise this monstrous sum, the government authorized the establishment of the Bank of England in 1694 as a joint-stock company to raise capital and lend to the government, and the huge expense of constructing, furnishing, supplying and victualling the new navy kickstarted the British economy (as it became in 1707, with the union of England and Scotland) and turned London into the financial hub it has been ever since.

⁶The satirist Ned Ward takes a more sardonic and xenophobic view of this cosmopolitan crowd in [2.15].

⁷Arabia: famous for its perfumes.

⁸2018 money: this comparison, together with all later ones, is derived from <https://www.measuringworth.com>, and is broadly indicative only, given the huge complexity (see website) of comparing different kinds of monetary value between widely separated periods.

This flood of money into the economy seemed to some contemporaries to be a channel of moral corruption, as exemplified by the South Sea Bubble, an early manifestation of what has recently been termed “irrational exuberance” in the stock market.⁹ The South Sea Company, founded in 1711 with a monopoly on trade with South America, was always more about romantic promise than likely performance, since that continent was under hostile Spanish rule at the time. Lack of actual profit did nothing to discourage starry-eyed investors, however, who created a demand that pushed up the price of the company’s stock, which in turn attracted even more investors, further inflating the share-price, in an accelerating feedback loop independent of reality or common sense: stock worth £100 at the end of 1719 was worth £1000 just six months later. In 1720 the company took over the newly-acquired National Debt, allowing its directors to make huge profits through insider trading which in turn financed enormous bribes to politicians. But in late 1720 the bubble burst, as bubbles must, and thousands were ruined by collapsing share prices as panicked investors sold their stock for whatever they could get. For Pope, already alarmed at the insidious corrupting power of “Blest paper-credit” (1966, 302), the episode was symptomatic of a deeper malaise, and he sketched, in a dystopic—and only half-joking—prophecy, an England in which “Corruption, like a general flood, / [...] Shall deluge all”, and, in a disintegrating of social distinctions by the universal solvent of avarice,

Statesman and patriot ply alike the stocks,
Peeress and butler share alike the box¹⁰;
And judges job, and bishops bite¹¹ the town,
And mighty Dukes pack cards¹² for half-a-crown. (Pope 1966, 306)

It is no coincidence that this period saw a rapid growth in legislative concern with crimes of property, and those crimes attracted savage penalties: the number of capital offences increased from just over 50 in 1688 to 160 in 1765 and 225 by 1815, and they included poaching, burglary, criminal damage, picking pockets and shoplifting (though the goods had to be worth more than five shillings; see [2.27]). But as brutal as the laws were, they had less of a deterrent effect than one might imagine, in part because the very ferocity of the code inhibited its application: juries were understandably reluctant to kill someone for stealing a pocket-handkerchief. For this reason, many people charged with capital crimes were acquitted, allowed to plead benefit

⁹As exemplified by the surprisingly favourable response (£2000—ca £285,000 in 2018—invested in one day) to the floating of a company in 1720 “for carrying on an undertaking of Great Advantage, but no one to know what it is” (Cowles 1960, 126).

¹⁰**box**: i.e. of dice.

¹¹**job, and ... bite**: buy and sell stock, and ... swindle.

¹²**pack cards**: cheat in a card-game by fraudulent shuffling; **half-a-crown**: two shillings and sixpence, about £15 in 2018.

of clergy,¹³ or received a lesser sentence. Defoe’s Moll Flanders, sentenced to death for shoplifting [2.28], simulates repentance and has her sentence reduced to transportation to the colonies.

Another reason for the failure of the law to prevent a huge upsurge in crime in this period was the sheer size and physical intricacy of Georgian London (recall that there was no professional London police force until 1829). As Henry Fielding, who had been a Justice of the Peace in Westminster, observed, “one great encouragement to theft of all kinds is the ease and safety with which stolen goods may be disposed of” (1967, 76), a relatively easy task in the anonymity of a vast city, which also promised “the probability of escaping punishment” (82):

Whoever indeed considers the cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast addition of their suburbs, the great irregularity of their buildings, the immense number of lanes, alleys, courts and by-places [*odd corners*], must think that, had they been intended for the very purpose of concealment, they could scarce have been better contrived. Upon such a view, the whole appears as a vast wood, or forest, in which a thief may harbour with as great security, as wild beasts do in the deserts of Africa or Arabia. (Fielding 1967, 83)

But many criminals were nonetheless caught, convicted of capital crimes, and held (pending execution) at Newgate, with all “the hellish noise, the roaring, swearing, and clamour, the stench, and nastiness” [2.28] that characterized it. They would eventually be carted off to be hanged at Tyburn Tree [2.29 HN], among crowds who were generally in a holiday mood, “as if the spectacle [...] afforded pleasure instead of pain” [2.29]. All sorts of people could be found in the crowd at executions, including ladies and gentlemen. James Boswell explained how even a refined aristocrat could become inured to such scenes:

I must confess that I myself am never absent from them. When I first attended them I was shocked to the greatest degree. I was in a manner convulsed with pity and terror, and for several days, but especially the night after, I was in a very dismal situation. Still, however I persisted in attending them and by degrees my sensibility abated; so that I can now see one with great composure [...] (1951, 345)

But Boswell’s active pursuit of the spectacle of suffering seemed to him to require explanation: he managed to convince himself that it was no morbid or sadistic impulse that drew people like him to executions, but (apparently) a

¹³**benefit of clergy**: originally a medieval ruling that excluded clerics from the judgment of secular courts, it became a way of mitigating the savagery of the laws for first-time offenders. If such offenders could recite part of Psalm 51 in Latin, they were deemed to be **clergy** through a legal fiction, and branded on the thumb to obviate a second claim. By means of this so-called ‘neck-verse’ Ben Jonson escaped the noose for manslaughter in 1598.

thoughtful reverence in the face of death: “the curiosity which impels people to be present at such affecting scenes is certainly a proof of sensibility, not of callousness. For it is observed that the greatest proportion of spectators is composed of women; and I do not apprehend that my readers will impute a barbarous severity to the fair sex” (346–7).

But not everyone in the crowd was there to contemplate the solemn spectacle of death, or rejoice in the triumph of justice: not all criminals, indeed, were perceived by everyone as transgressors. Several kinds of property crime—smuggling, for example, or poaching—were seen by many as the exercise of customary rights, and their punishment as a form of oppression. Moreover, the execution of a celebrity criminal such as a debonair highwayman, often dressed in his finest clothes, could become a celebration of dash, *sprezzatura* and rebellious courage, particularly in a period where the corrupt activities of the South Sea Company directors and Sir Robert Walpole’s cabinet had blurred the distinction between business practice and simple theft.¹⁴ Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), with its gallant highwayman hero Macheath, explores this strange confusion of values, in which Peachum, who profits from both sides of the law as corrupt thief-taker and receiver of stolen goods, sings “The statesman, because he’s so great, / Thinks his trade as honest as mine” (Gay 1983, 4).

Of course, the enormous crowds that turned out for executions represented in theory a dangerous source of possible sedition. Yet the potential for urban mob fury that in Paris brought about the overthrow of a political system, in London issued only in the futile xenophobic tantrum of the Gordon Riots [2.31].

Peter Groves (Monash University)

2.1 CELIA FIENNES: SOME TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF LONDON

Celia Fiennes (1662–1741), a granddaughter of William Fiennes, 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, was born in Wiltshire but lived in London from 1691. She travelled around England mainly on horseback from the early 1680s until about 1712 and visited every county, Wales, and Scotland. She had no pretensions to being a historian, unlike her predecessor William Camden (1551–1623), but her extensive commentaries show her enthusiasm and unbounded curiosity, as well as shrewd common sense in her plainspoken factual accounts of what she observes. Her description of London derives from one of her innumerable journeys. The occasional disconnectedness of her narrative has been retained, but her unconventional grammar has been repaired (square brackets).

¹⁴By no means all those hanged at Tyburn were celebrated as heroes, however: Elizabeth Brownrigg (1720–1767), for example, who whipped to death Mary Clifford, her fifteen-year-old apprentice, was sent on her way with exultant jeers and curses by a huge crowd of outraged citizens.

From Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary (1888) (written 1703)

It cannot be thought amiss here to add some remark on the metropolis of England, London, whose situation [is] on so noble a river as the Thames, which empties it at the buoy of the Nore,¹⁵ being there joined with the Medway—another very fine river also—and falls there into the sea which is about 30 miles from London, and is an ebbing, flowing river as far as Sheen beyond London. This is very commodious for ships which did come up just to the Bridge but from carelessness the river is choked up, that obliges the ships to come to an anchor at Blackwall. All along this river are several docks for building ships of the biggest burden. Six miles from the town the last year was built the Royal Sovereign,¹⁶ which is our greatest ship. London joined with Westminster which are two great cities but now with building so joined it makes up but one vast building [*conurbation*] with all its suburbs, and has in the walls 97 parishes, without the walls 16 parishes, 15 suburbs, Surrey, Middlesex, seven parishes in Westminster.

London is the City properly for trade, Westminster for the Court [...]

[*There follows a lengthy account of a Lord Mayor's pageant and other ceremonies, and also an account of the grand entry into London by King William III in 1697.*]

There is as I said great public stock in the City by which they have raised sumptuous buildings, the Royal Exchange for one, a large space of ground enclosed round with cloisters and open arches on which are built many walks of shops of all trades. The middle space below was designed and is used for the merchants to meet to concert their business and trade and bills, which is all open and on the top of these piazzas are the effigies in stone of most of our kings and queens since the Conquest, which were anointed crowned heads from whence this Exchange takes its name Royal. In the midst of it stands in stone work on a pedestal the effigies of King Charles II nailed in with iron spikes. There is also at the Bridge a great Monument of stone work as is the Exchange. This is of a great height—300 steps up and on the top gives the view of the whole town. This was set up in memory of God's putting a check to the raging flame which by the plots and contrivance of the Papists was lighted.¹⁷ There is a large inscription on it all round mentioning it, and also of the Popish plot¹⁸ and the Gun Powder Treason¹⁹ and all by the Papists.

¹⁵**Nore:** a hazardous sandbank in the Thames estuary.

¹⁶**Royal Sovereign:** a 100-gun first-rate ship of the line, decommissioned in 1768.

¹⁷**by plots ... lighted:** This was a common misbelief. The part of the inscription on the Monument blaming the Papists (mentioned below) was added in 1681 and finally erased in 1831.

¹⁸**Popish plot:** The (purely imaginary) Catholic plot invented by Titus Oates 1678–1681.

¹⁹**Gun Power Treason:** the (real) Catholic plot by Robert Catesby, Guy Fawkes, and others in 1605 to blow up the Houses of Parliament; see [2.31], n.144.

The Bridge [1.2 HN] is a stately building all stone with 18 arches, most of them big enough to admit a large barge to pass; it's so broad that two coaches drive abreast and there is on each side houses and shops just like any large street in the City, of which there are many and well built, even and lofty, most ha[ve] five if not six degrees [storeys].

Most of the [Guild-]Halls belonging to each company are large and magnificent buildings, as also the churches—very fine and lofty of stone work. The great cathedral is St Paul's which was a vast building but burnt by fire—[and] has since by the City been built up, or rather a tax on coals which brings all to pay for it in London [2.13 HN]. It now is almost finished and very magnificent, the choir with curious carved work in wood, the archbishop's seat and the Bishop of London's and Lord Mayor's is very finely carved and adorned; the altar also with velvet and gold. On the right side is placed a large crimson velvet elbow chair which is for the Dean. This is all finished (with a sweet organ) but the body of the Church which is to be closed on the top with a large cupola is not quite done.

There was formerly in the City several houses of the noblemen's with large gardens and outhouses and great attendances, but of late [they] are pulled down and built into streets and squares and called by the names of the noblemen, and this is the practice by almost all even just to the Court, excepting one or two.

2.2 DANIEL DEFOE: LONDON SURGING IN SIZE

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) was a versatile and prolific writer in fiction, pamphleteering, and verse, his oeuvre amounting to more than 550 works. He wrote on almost every subject of popular appeal—political, topographical, commercial, religious, and social. Among such works was his Journal of the Plague Year (1722) [2.8]. He resided in London but travelled widely in England and the Continent. His fictions (always masquerading as fact, ironically to appease his Puritan readership, for whom fiction was mere lying) include the ever popular Robinson Crusoe (1719), as well as the mildly salacious Moll Flanders (1722) [2.27–2.28]. He wrote in a plain style with a journalist's keen eye for realistic detail, the result being convincing narratives that were immensely readable.

From A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724–1726), Vol. 2, Letter 2

London, as a city only,²⁰ and as its walls and liberties²¹ line it out, might, indeed, be viewed in a small compass; but, when I speak of London, now in the modern acceptation, you expect I shall take in all that vast mass of

²⁰London, as a city only: i.e. the City of London by itself.

²¹liberties: adjacent districts which for historical reasons did not form part of a self-governing borough like the City of London. Shakespeare's Globe theatre, for example, though geographically part of London, was conveniently situated in the Liberty of the Clink, under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester, not the Puritan theatre-hating City of London.

buildings, reaching from Black-Wall in the east, to Tot-Hill Fields in the west; and extended in an unequal breadth, from the bridge, or river, in the south, to Islington north; and from Peterburgh House on the bank side in Westminster, to Cavendish Square, and all the new buildings by, and beyond, Hannover Square, by which the city of London, for so it is still to be called, is extended to Hyde Park Corner in the Brentford Road, and almost to Maribone in the Acton Road, and how much farther it may spread, who knows? New squares, and new streets rising up every day to such a prodigy of buildings, that nothing in the world does, or ever did, equal it, except old Rome in Trajan's time,²² when the walls were fifty miles in compass, and the number of inhabitants six million eight hundred thousand souls.

It is the disaster of London, as to the beauty of its figure, that it is thus stretched out in buildings, just at the pleasure of every builder or undertaker of buildings, and as the convenience of the people directs, whether for trade or otherwise; and this has spread the face of it in a most straggling, confused manner, out of all shape, uncompact, and unequal; neither long or broad, round or square; whereas the city of Rome, though a monster for its greatness, yet was, in a manner, round, with very few irregularities in its shape.

At London, including the buildings on both sides the water, one sees it, in some places, three miles broad, as from St George's in Southwark to Shoreditch in Middlesex; or two miles, as from Peterburgh House to Montague House; and in some places, not half a mile, as in Wapping; and much less, as in Redriff.

We see several villages, formerly standing, as it were, in the country, and at a great distance, now joined to the streets by continued buildings, and more making haste to meet in the like manner; for example, Deptford. This town was formerly reckoned at least two miles off from Redriff, and that over the marshes too—a place unlikely ever to be inhabited—and yet now by the increase of buildings in that town itself, and the many streets erected at Redriff, and by the docks and building yards on the riverside, which stand between both, the town of Deptford and the streets of Redriff (or Rotherhithe, as they write it) are effectually joined, and the buildings daily increasing, so that Deptford is no more a separated town but is become a part of the great mass, and infinitely full of people also. Here they have, within the last two or three years, built a fine new church,²³ and were the

²²The Roman emperor **Trajan** (98–117 CE) undertook a huge public building programme in the capital. Its population at the time is (*pace* Defoe) usually reckoned at about one million, a size London only reached in 1800.

²³**a fine new church:** St Paul's, Deptford, a splendid baroque church designed by Thomas Archer, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren.

town of Deptford now separated and rated by itself, I believe it contains more people, and stands upon more ground, than the city of Wells. [...]

That Westminster is in a fair way to shake hands with Chelsea, as St. Giles's is with Marybone; and Great Russell Street by Montague House, with Tottenham-Court: all this is very evident, and yet all these put together, are still to be called London. Whither will this monstrous city then extend? and where must a circumvallation or communication line²⁴ of it be placed?

THE RESTORATION

2.3 JOHN EVELYN: CHARLES II'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO LONDON

John Evelyn graphically describes in his Diary the rejoicing at Charles's return to London after the restoration of the monarchy (for a note on Evelyn see [1.28 HN]). Charles had landed at Dover from The Hague and was received with great acclaim in Rochester and other towns en route to London.

[29 May 1660] This day his Majesty Charles II came to London after a sad and long exile and calamitous suffering both of the King and Church, being 17 years. This was also his birthday,²⁵ and with a triumph of above 20,000 horse and foot, brandishing their swords and shouting with inexpressible joy; the ways strewd with flowers, the bells ringing, the streets hung with tapestry, fountains running with wine; the mayor, aldermen, and all the companies in their liveries, chains of gold, and banners; lords and nobles clad in cloth of silver, gold, and velvet; the windows and balconies well set with ladies; trumpets, music, and myriads of people flocking, even so far as from Rochester, so as they were seven hours in passing the city, even from two in the afternoon till nine at night.

I stood in the Strand and beheld it, and blessed God. And all this was done without one drop of blood shed, and by that very army which rebelled against him; but it was the Lord's doing, for such a Restoration was never mentioned in any history ancient or modern, since the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity²⁶; nor so joyful a day and so bright ever seen in this nation, this happening when to expect or effect it was past all human policy.

²⁴ **circumvallation ... communication line**: military terms (perimeter wall or defence ... route of communication).

²⁵ **his birthday**: Charles was born 29 May 1630.

²⁶ **the return ... Babylonish captivity**: See [1.28], n.169.

2.4 EVELYN: BODIES OF CROMWELL AND OTHERS EXHUMED

John Evelyn recounts with evident satisfaction the inglorious fate of the bodies of Oliver Cromwell and his fellow regicides.

[30 January 1661] [...] This day (O the stupendous and inscrutable judgments of God!) were the carcasses of those arch rebels Cromwell, Bradshaw the judge who condemned his Majesty, and Ireton, son-in-law to the usurper,²⁷ dragged out of their superb tombs in Westminster among the kings, to Tyburn [2.29 HN], and hanged on the gallows there from nine in the morning till six at night, and then buried under that fatal and ignominious monument in a deep pit, thousands of people who had seen them in all their pride being spectators. Look back at 22 November 1658²⁸ and be astonished! And fear God and honour the King; but meddle not with them who are given to change!

2.5 EVELYN: GAMBLING AND DEBAUCHERY AT THE COURT OF CHARLES II

The second entry is a marginal note in Evelyn's Diary written a week after Charles's death. Evelyn was scathing about the King's mistresses, referring to them as "cattle of that sort."

[6 January 1662] This evening, according to custom, his Majesty opened the revels of that night by throwing the dice himself in the privy chamber, where was a table set on purpose, and lost his 100 pounds.²⁹ (The year before he won 150 pounds.) The ladies also played very deep. I came away when the Duke of Ormond had won about 1000 pounds, and left them still at passage,³⁰ cards, etc. at other tables, both there and at the Groom-porter's, observing the wicked folly and monstrous excess of passion amongst some losers. Sorry I am that such a wretched custom as play to that excess should be countenanced in a court which ought to be an example of virtue to the rest of the kingdom.

²⁷ Cromwell... usurper: Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658); John Bradshaw (1602–1659); Henry Ireton (1611–1651). The date (30 January) was the 12th anniversary of Charles I's execution.

²⁸ 22 November 1658: Cromwell's funeral; he died on 3 September, but the funeral was delayed to give time to prepare for the magnificent (and very costly) ceremony.

²⁹ 100 pounds: over £13,000 in 2018 money.

³⁰ passage: a game of dice.

[6 February 1685] I can never forget the inexpressible luxury³¹ and profaneness, gaming, and all dissoluteness, and as it were total forgetfulness of God (it being Sunday evening), which this day sennight³² I was witness of; the King sitting and toying with his concubines, Portsmouth, Cleveland, and Mazarin,³³ etc., a French boy singing love songs in that glorious gallery, whilst about 20 of the great courtiers and other dissolute persons were at basset³⁴ round a large table, a bank of at least 2000 in gold before them, upon which two gentlemen who were with me made reflections with astonishment. Six days after was all in the dust.

2.6 EVELYN: JAMES II'S ILL-TIMED FEAST FOR THE VENETIAN AMBASSADORS

Evelyn disapproves of the sumptuous festivities that James II holds in honour of the Venetian ambassadors, since the court is still officially in mourning, following the death of Charles II on 6 February 1685.

[18 December 1685] [...] The dinner was most magnificent and plentiful, at four tables, with music, kettle drums, and trumpets, which sounded upon a whistle at every health. The banquet was 12 vast chargers piled up so high that those who sat one against another could hardly see each other. Of these sweetmeats, which doubtless were some days piling up in that exquisite manner, the ambassadors touched not, but leaving them to the spectators who came out of curiosity to see the dinner, were exceedingly pleased to see in what a moment of time all that curious work was demolished, the confitures voided,³⁵ and the tables cleared. Thus his Majesty entertained them three days, which (for the table only) cost him £600,³⁶ as the Clerk of the Green Cloth, Sir William Boreman, assured me. Dinner ended, I saw their procession or cavalcade to Whitehall, innumerable coaches attending. The two ambassadors had four coaches of their own and 50 footmen, as I remember, besides other equipage as splendid as the occasion would permit, the court being still in mourning.

³¹**luxury**: lascivious behaviour, hanky-panky.

³²**sennight**: week (i.e. a *seven-night*).

³³**Portsmouth ... Mazarin**: Louise de K rouaille, Duchess of **Portsmouth** (1649–1734) (a “young wanton,” wrote Evelyn); Barbara Palmer, Duchess of **Cleveland** (1640–1709) (“an impudent woman,” “curse of our nation”); Hortense Mancini, Duchess **Mazarin** (1646–1699) (a “famous beauty and errant lady”).

³⁴**basset**: a card game.

³⁵**confitures voided**: confections taken away.

³⁶**£600**: worth about £87,000 in 2018.

THE GREAT PLAGUE

2.7 SAMUEL PEPYS DESCRIBES THE PLAGUE

*The last severe outbreak of the bubonic plague in Britain occurred in 1665–1666, when over 100,000 people, about a quarter of London’s population, died. The plague constantly recurred and the numbers of its victims had been published regularly after the outbreak of 1603. It was caused by infectious bites from fleas (see **Introduction 2**, p. 102), but because this was not known, it seemed to strike its victims suddenly and at random. (see also [1.11–1.12] and footnotes).*

Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) stayed in London during the plague as he held important posts in naval affairs (he was to become Secretary to the Admiralty in 1672). His firsthand account of the plague in his Diary provides an invaluable source of information on everyday life (and death) in London, as well as insights into the personality of Pepys himself.

[3 September 1665] [...] Among other stories one was very passionate, methought, of a complaint brought against a man in the town for taking a child from London from an infected house. Alderman Hooker³⁷ told us it was the child of a very able citizen in Gracious [*Gracechurch*] Street, a saddler, who had buried all the rest of his children of the plague; and himself and wife, now being shut up in despair of escaping, did desire only to save the life of this little child, and so prevailed to have it received stark naked into the arms of a friend,³⁸ who brought it, having put it into new fresh clothes, to Greenwich, where, upon hearing the story we did agree it should be permitted to be received and kept in the town.

[14 September 1665] [...] And, Lord! To see how I did endeavour all I could to talk with as few as I could, there being now no observation [*observance*] of shutting up of houses infected, that to be sure we do converse and meet with people that have the plague upon them. I spent some thoughts upon the occurrences of this day, giving as much content on one hand, and melancholy on another, as any day in all my life. For the first: the finding of my money and plate and all safe at London, and speeding in my business this day. The hearing of this good news to such excess, after so great a despair of my Lord’s³⁹ doing anything this year; adding to that, the decrease of 500 and more, which is the first decrease we have yet had in the sickness since it began; and great hopes that the next week it will be greater. Then, on the other side, my finding that though the Bill⁴⁰ in general is abated, yet the City,

³⁷ **Alderman Hooker**: Sir Richard Hooker, who became Lord Mayor in 1673.

³⁸ **the child ... of a friend**: This “passionate” [*moving*] anecdote formed the subject of a painting by Frank Topham, “Lord Have Mercy Upon Us” (1898), held in the Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

³⁹ **my Lord**: Sir Edward Montagu (1625–1672), first Earl of Sandwich, Pepy’s patron.

⁴⁰ **Bill**: the Bill of Mortality, a periodically published official report of the deaths in a given district.

within the walls, is increased, and likely to continue so, and is close to our house there. My meeting dead corpses of the plague, carried to be buried close to me at noonday, through the City in Fenchurch Street. To see a person sick of the sores carried close by me by Gracechurch in a hackney coach. My finding the Angel Tavern, at the lower end of Tower Hill shut up; and more than that, the alehouse at the Tower Stairs; and more than that, that the person was then dying of the plague when I was last there, a little while ago, at night. To hear that poor Payne, my waiter [*servant*], hath buried a child, and is dying himself. To hear that a labourer I sent but the other day to Dagenhams,⁴¹ to know how they did there, is dead of the plague; and that one of my own watermen, that carried me daily, fell sick as soon as he had landed me on Friday morning last, when I had been all night upon the water, and I believe he did get his infection that day at Brainford,⁴² and is now dead of the plague. To hear that Captain Lambert and Cuttle⁴³ are killed in the taking these ships; and that Mr Sidney Montagu is sick of a desperate fever at my Lady Carteret's, at Scott's Hall.⁴⁴ To hear that Mr Lewis hath another daughter sick. And lastly, that both my servants W. Hewer⁴⁵ and Tom Edwards,⁴⁶ have lost their fathers, both in St Sepulchre's⁴⁷ parish, of the plague this week, do put me into great apprehensions of melancholy, and with good reason. But I put off my thoughts of sadness as much as I can, and the rather to keep my wife in good heart, and family also.

2.8 DANIEL DEFOE'S IMAGINATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE GREAT PLAGUE

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) wrote A Journal of the Plague Year five decades after it occurred. In 1665 he could not have been more than five or six years old, but his extraordinarily realistic account of the horrors of the plague have the appearance of being from first hand observation. His information was presumably derived from friends and relatives who survived and also from books and pamphlets (he was a keen reader); doubtless also they were embellished by his imagination. (For a note on Defoe, see [2.2 HN]).

⁴¹**Dagenhams:** near Romford, Essex, seat of Lady Wright, sister-in-law of Sir Edward Montagu.

⁴²**Brainford:** Brentford, in Essex, where Pepys had a country house.

⁴³**Captain Lambert and Cuttle:** David Lambert and John Cuttle, both friends of Pepys, were killed in the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

⁴⁴**Mr Sidney Montagu ... Scott's Hall:** Montagu was the son of Lord Sandwich; Scott's Hall, Kent was the home of Sir Thomas Scott, son-in-law of Sir George Carteret and Lady Carteret.

⁴⁵**W. Hewer:** William Hewer was Pepys's chief clerk.

⁴⁶**Tom Edwards:** A servant of Pepys, who refers to him as 'my boy'; they were close companions.

⁴⁷**St Sepulchres:** See [2.28], n.137.

From A Journal of the Plague Year (1722)

This was a mournful scene indeed, and affected me almost as much as the rest; but the other was awful and full of terror: the cart had in it 16 or 17 bodies; some were wrapped up in linen sheets, some in rugs, some little other than naked, or so loose that what covering they had fell from them in the shooting out of the cart, and they fell quite naked among the rest; but the matter was not much to them, or the indecency much to anyone else, seeing they were all dead, and were to be huddled together into the common grave of mankind, as we may call it, for here was no difference made, but poor and rich went together. There was no other way of burials, neither was it possible there should, for coffins were not to be had for the prodigious numbers that fell in such a calamity as this.

It was reported by way of scandal upon the buriers, that if any corpse was delivered to them decently wound up, as we called it then, in a winding sheet tied over the head and feet, which some did, and which was generally of good linen; I say, it was reported that the buriers were so wicked as to strip them in the cart, and carry them quite naked to the ground. But as I cannot easily credit anything so vile among Christians, and at a time so filled with terrors as that was, I can only relate it and leave it undetermined.

Innumerable stories also went about of the cruel behaviours and practices of nurses who tended the sick, and of their hastening on the fate of those they tended in their sickness [...]

[...] Sometimes a man or woman dropped down dead in the very markets; for many people that had the plague upon them knew nothing of it till the inward gangrene had affected their vitals and they died in a few moments. This caused that many died frequently in that manner in the streets suddenly, without any warning. Others perhaps had time to go to the next bulk⁴⁸ or stall, or to any door, porch, and just sit down and die, as I have said before.

These objects were so frequent in the streets that when the plague came to be very raging, on one side there was scarce any passing by the streets but that several dead bodies would be lying here and there upon the ground. On the other hand it is observable that though at first the people would stop as they went along and call to the neighbours to come out on such an occasion, yet afterward no notice was taken of them, but that, if at any time we found a corpse lying, go 'cross the way and not come near it; or if in a narrow lane or passage, go back again, and seek some other way to go on the business we were upon; and in those cases, the corpse was always left till the officers had notice to come and take them away; or till night, when the bearers attending the Dead Cart would take them up and carry them away. Nor did those undaunted creatures who performed these offices fail to search their pockets, and sometimes strip off their clothes if they were well dressed, as sometimes they were, and carry off what they could get [...]

⁴⁸**bulk:** a counter projecting from a shop into the street.

[... I]t is scarce credible what dreadful cases happened in particular families every day: people in the rage of the distemper, or in the torment of their swellings, which was indeed intolerable, running out of their own government, raving and distracted, and oftentimes laying violent hands upon themselves, throwing themselves out at their windows, shooting themselves, etc.; mothers murdering their own children in their lunacy, some dying of mere grief as a passion, some of mere fright and surprise without any infection at all; others frightened into idiotism and foolish distractions; some into despair and lunacy, others into melancholy madness.

THE GREAT FIRE

2.9 JOHN DRYDEN: LONDON ON FIRE

Just after midnight on Sunday 2nd September, 1666, a fire broke out in a bakery in Pudding Lane, near London Bridge, and over four days spread rapidly westward, blown by a strong east wind that fanned its flames into a temperature that could melt the iron bars in Newgate prison, and blew embers that started spot-fires ahead of its progress. It was helped by the fact that “the streets were not only narrow and the houses all built of timber, lath and plaster [...] but the manner of the building in those days, one storey projecting out beyond another, was such that in some narrow streets the houses almost touched one another at the top” [2.11]. It was also assisted by the absence of professional fire-fighters and effective fire-fighting equipment, and by the inactivity of the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Bloodworth, who (roused early on Sunday morning) declined to authorize the destruction of houses to create fire-breaks on the grounds that “a woman could piss it out”. By Wednesday evening it had destroyed most of the City (except the north-eastern edge, from Bishopsgate to the Tower) and an area to its west, up to Temple Bar, devouring 32,000 houses, 87 churches, St Paul’s Cathedral, the great Guildhalls, and the Royal Exchange. It even began to cross the Bridge, but was stopped by a gap in the houses.

John Dryden (1631–1700), poet, dramatist, and essayist, wrote Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666—a poem in the epic style, which describes (among other things) the spread of the fire and the devastation it caused. Dryden had become a fervent royalist, and the poem is a patriotic and pious one (but not without irony). Charles II and James Duke of York are given lavish praise for their firefighting efforts, but London is saved finally by God’s intervention so that it will become an even greater city, its streets “With silver paved, and all divine with gold.”

From Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666 (1667)

215

Such was the rise of this prodigious fire,
Which in mean buildings first obscurely bred,
From thence did soon to open streets aspire,
And straight to palaces and temples spread.

216

The diligence of trades and noiseful gain,
 And luxury, more late,⁴⁹ asleep were laid;
 All was the night's, and in her silent reign,
 No sound the rest of nature did invade.

217

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
 Those seeds of fire their fatal birth disclose;
 And first, few scattering sparks about were blown,
 Big⁵⁰ with the flames that to our ruin rose.

218

Then, in some close-pent room it crept along,
 And smouldering as it went, in silence fed;
 Till th'infant monster, with devouring strong,
 Walked boldly upright with exalted head.

219

Now, like some rich or mighty murderer,
 Too great for prison, which he breaks with gold;
 Who fresher for new mischiefs does appear,
 And dares the world to tax him with the old.

220

So 'scapes th'insulting⁵¹ fire his narrow gaol,
 And makes small outlets into open air;
 There the fierce winds his open force assail,
 And beat him downward to his first repair.

221

The winds, like crafty courtesans, withheld
 His flames from burning, but to blow them more;
 And, every fresh attempt, he is repell'd
 With faint denials, weaker than before.

222

And now, no longer letted [*hindered*] of his prey,
 He leaps up at it with enrag'd desire;
 O'erlooks the neighbours with a wide survey,
 And nods at every house his threatening fire.

⁴⁹ **more late**: later to bed than honest tradesmen.

⁵⁰ **Big**: pregnant.

⁵¹ **insulting**: (1) leaping friskily; (2) attacking.

223

The ghosts of traitors from the Bridge⁵² descend,
 With bold fanatic spectres to rejoice;
 About the fire into a dance they bend,
 And sing their Sabbath⁵³ notes with feeble voice [...]

255

Those who have homes, when home they do repair
 To a last lodging call their wandering friends.
 Their short uneasy sleeps are broke with care,
 To look how near their own destruction tends.

256

Those who have none sit round where once it was,
 And with full eyes each wonted room require;
 Haunting the yet warm ashes of the place,
 As murder'd men walk where they did expire.

257

Some stir up coals and watch the Vestal⁵⁴ fire,
 Others in vain from sight of ruin run;
 And while through burning labyrinths they retire,
 With loathing eyes repeat what they would shun.

258

The most, in fields, like herded beasts lie down;
 To dews obnoxious⁵⁵ on the grassy floor;
 And while their babes in sleep their sorrows drown,
 Sad parents watch the remnants of their store.

259

While by the motion of the flames they guess
 What streets are burning now, and what are near;
 An infant, waking, to the paps would press,
 And meets, instead of milk, a falling tear [...]

⁵²**The ghosts ... Bridge:** The heads of traitors were displayed on spikes on London **Bridge**.

⁵³**Sabbath:** (1) Sunday, when the fire broke out, just after midnight; (2) "A midnight meeting of demons, sorcerers and witches, presided over by the Devil" (*OED*).

⁵⁴**Vestal:** Vesta was the ancient Roman goddess of the hearth.

⁵⁵**To dews obnoxious:** exposed to [harmful] damp.

275

Nor could thy fabric, Paul's, defend thee long,
 Though thou wert sacred to thy Maker's praise;
 Though made immortal by a poet's song⁵⁶;
 And poets' songs the Theban walls could raise.⁵⁷

276

The daring flames peep'd in and saw from far,
 The awful beauties of the sacred choir;
 But, since it was profan'd by Civil War,⁵⁸
 Heaven thought it fit to have it purg'd by fire.

277

Now down the narrow streets it swiftly came,
 And widely opening, did on both sides prey.
 This benefit we sadly owe the flame,
 If only ruin must enlarge our way.

278

And now four days the sun had seen our woes,
 Four nights the moon beheld th'incessant fire;
 It seemed as if the stars more sickly rose,
 And farther from the feverish north retire.

279

In th'empyrean Heav'n (the bless'd abode)
 The Thrones and the Dominions⁵⁹ prostrate lie,
 Not daring to behold their angry God;
 And an hush'd silence damps the tuneful sky.

280

At length th'Almighty cast a pitying eye,
 And mercy softly touch'd his melting breast;
 He saw the town's one half in rubbish lie,
 And eager flames give on to storm the rest.

⁵⁶**Though made ... song:** Referring to Edmund Waller's poem "Upon His Majesty's Repairing of Paul's" (1645).

⁵⁷**And poets' songs ... raise:** Referring to the harpist Amphion in Greek mythology, whose music drew stones together to build the walls of Thebes.

⁵⁸**profaned by Civil War:** Cromwell used the nave as cavalry barracks; the iconoclastic Parliamentarians severely damaged effigies, woodwork, and windows.

⁵⁹**Thrones and Dominions:** two of the nine orders of angels.

281

An hollow crystal pyramid he takes,
 In firmamental waters dipp'd above;
 Of it a broad extinguisher he makes,
 And hoods the flames that to their quarry strove.

282

The vanquish'd fires withdraw from every place,
 Or full with feeding, sink into a sleep;
 Each household Genius⁶⁰ shows again his face,
 And from the hearths the little Lares⁶¹ creep.

2.10 PEPYS' BURIED TREASURES

Samuel Pepys and others bury their possessions of value to be safe from the Fire.

[4 September 1666] Up by break of day to get away the remainder of my things, which I did by a lighter at the Iron Gate⁶²; and my hands [*servants*] so few that it was the afternoon before we could get them all away. Sir W. Pen⁶³ and I to the Tower Street, and there met the fire burning three or four doors beyond Mr Howell's,⁶⁴ whose goods, poor man, his trays, and dishes, shovels, etc. were flung all along Tower Street in the kennels [*gutters*], and people working therewith from one end to the other; the fire coming on in that narrow street on both sides with infinite fury. Sir W. Batten,⁶⁵ not knowing how to remove his wine, did dig a pit in the garden and laid it in there; and I took the opportunity of laying all the papers of my office that I could not otherwise dispose of. And in the evening Sir W. Pen and I did dig another and put our wine in it, and I my parmesan cheese⁶⁶ as well as my wine and some other things.

2.11 DEFOE: LONDON BEFORE AND AFTER THE FIRE

Daniel Defoe affirms that due to the lack of any enforcement of planning laws that were made after the Great Fire, more houses were built in London after the Fire than before it, and the amount of open ground was noticeably reduced. See also [2.2 HN].

⁶⁰**Genius**: tutelary deity.

⁶¹**Lares**: gods of the household in Roman mythology.

⁶²**Iron Gate**: Irongate Stairs in Lower Thames Street, near the Tower.

⁶³**Sir W. Pen**: William **Pen** (or Penn) (1621–1670) was Vice-Admiral in the Commonwealth and an Admiral thereafter; he was Commissioner of the Navy Board under Pepys.

⁶⁴**Mr Howell**: a turner in the employ of the Navy Board.

⁶⁵**Sir W. Batten**: Sir William **Batten** (d. 1667), a naval officer and Surveyor of the Navy.

⁶⁶**parmesan cheese** (from Parma in Italy) was much rarer and dearer than it is now.

From A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724–1726), Vol. 2, Letter 2

It is true that before the Fire of London the streets were narrow and public edifices, as well as private, were more crowded, and built closer to one another; for soon after the Fire, the King, by his proclamation, forbid all persons whatsoever, to go about to rebuild for a certain time, viz. till the Parliament (which was soon to sit) might regulate and direct the manner of building, and establish rules for the adjusting every man's property, and yet might take order for a due enlarging of the streets and appointing the manner of building as well for the beauty as the conveniency of the city, and for safety in case of any future accident; for though I shall not inquire whether the city was burnt by accident or by treachery, yet nothing was more certain than that as the city stood before, it was strangely exposed to the disaster which happened, and the buildings looked as if they had been formed to make one general bonfire, whenever any wicked party of incendiaries should think fit.

The streets were not only narrow and the houses all built of timber, lath and plaster, or, as they were very properly called Paper Work, and one of the finest range of buildings in the Temple are, to this day, called the Paper Buildings from that usual expression.

But the manner of the building in those days, one storey projecting out beyond another, was such that in some narrow streets the houses almost touched one another at the top, and it has been known that men, in case of fire, have escaped on the tops of the houses, by leaping from one side of a street to another; this made it often, and almost always happen, that if a house was on fire, the opposite house was in more danger to be fired by it, according as the wind stood, than the houses next adjoining on either side.

How this has been regulated, how it was before, and how much better it now is, I leave to be judged by comparing the old unburnt part of the city with the new.

But though by the new buildings after the Fire, much ground was given up and left unbuilt to enlarge the streets, yet 'tis to be observed that the old houses stood severally upon more ground, were much larger upon the flat, and in many places, gardens and large yards about them, all which in the new buildings are, at least, contracted, and the ground generally built up into other houses, so that, notwithstanding all the ground given up for beautifying the streets, yet there are many more houses built than stood before upon the same ground; so that taking the whole city together, there are more inhabitants in the same compass than there was before [...]

Another increase of buildings in the city is to be taken from the inhabitants in the unburnt parts following the same example, of pulling down great old buildings, which took up large tracks of ground in some of the well inhabited places, and building on the same ground not only several houses, but even whole streets of houses, which are since fully inhabited [...]

These are prodigious enlargements to the city, even upon that which I call inhabited ground, and where infinite numbers of people now live, more than lived upon the same spot of ground before.

INSTITUTIONS

2.12 JOHN EVELYN: SOME UNUSUAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY

In the 1640s and 1650s a group of people interested in 'natural philosophy' met informally at various venues, including Gresham College.⁶⁷ They formed the nucleus of what became a Society in 1660, which, having been granted a royal charter in 1662 by Charles II, became 'The Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge,' the first national institution in the world devoted to the advancement of science. Its motto, nullius in verba (roughly, 'don't take anyone's word for it'), represents the revolutionary rejection of mere authority as a source of knowledge in favour of experiment and observation, and the early work of the society was consequently resisted and even derided by conservatives; Jonathan Swift [2.20 HN] lampooned it in Gulliver's Travels (1726) as the 'Academy of Lagado,' where barely sane 'projectors' seek to extract sunlight from cucumbers or discover knowledge by mechanically-generated random combinations of words. But history was not on Swift's side: early Fellows of the Royal Society include such extraordinary scientific luminaries as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke, each with a scientific law⁶⁸ to his credit, Sir Isaac Newton (with many such laws), and the architect of St Paul's [2.13 HN], the mathematician Sir Christopher Wren.

But to be fair to Swift, the early proceedings of the Society, though enthusiastic, were not narrowly focussed, and didn't always resemble science as we now understand it, at times verging on the eccentric. John Evelyn was one of the group who founded the Royal Society, and his Diary relates the great variety of the business that was transacted.

[5 April 1682] To the R. Society, where at a Council was regulated what *Collections* should be published monthly, as formerly the *Transactions*, which had of late been discontinued but were now much called for by the curious abroad and at home.

[12 April 1682] I went this afternoon with several of the Royal Society to a supper which was all dressed, both fish and flesh, in Monsieur Papin's Digesters,⁶⁹ by which the hardest bones of beef itself, and mutton, were

⁶⁷Founded in 1597 under the will of Sir Thomas Gresham, Gresham College is London's first institution of higher learning, where professors (who hold temporary tenure) give public lectures. Originally the subjects were confined to astronomy, geometry, medicine, law, divinity, rhetoric and music, but since 1985 they have expanded to include commerce, the environment, and information technology.

⁶⁸Hooke's Law defines the amount of force required to deform an elastic body such as a spring, and Boyle's Law defines the relation between the volume of a gas and the pressure exerted on it.

⁶⁹**Monsieur Papin's Digesters:** Denis Papin (1647–?1712) was elected a member of the Royal Society in 1680. His book (see below) was *A New Digester or Engine for Softening Bones* (1681).

made as soft as cheese, without water or other liquor, and with less than eight ounces of coals, producing an incredible quantity of gravy; and for close of all a jelly made of the bones of beef, the best for clearness and good relish, and the most delicious that I had ever seen or tasted. We eat pike and other fish bones, and all without impediment; but nothing exceeded the pigeons, which tasted just as if baked in a pie, all these being stewed in their own juice, without any addition of water save what swam about the Digester, as *in balneo*⁷⁰; the natural juice of all these provisions acting on the grosser substances, reduced the hardest bones to tenderness; but it is best descanted with more particulars for extracting tinctures, preserving and stewing fruit, and saving fuel, in Dr Papin's book, published and dedicated to our Society, of which he is a member. He is since gone to Venice with the late Resident here,⁷¹ and also a member of our Society, who carried this excellent mechanic, philosopher, and physician to set up a philosophical meeting in that city. This philosophical supper caused much mirth amongst us, and exceedingly pleased all the company.

2.13 NED WARD: THE REBUILDING OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Old St Paul's was gutted by the Great Fire in 1666, and it was decided to demolish it and build a completely new cathedral, which was accomplished with astonishing speed for such a huge edifice. After Christopher Wren received the royal warrant for one of his designs in 1675, in the Baroque style, with a magnificent dome and a porticoed west front, building was completed in only 36 years. Even so, Londoners were impatient at what seemed to be lack of progress. Edward (Ned) Ward (1667–1731) comments with some acidity on the inefficiency of the labourers he observes. He was a London publican, known for his entertaining conversation and the graphic accounts in his writings of everyday life in London.

From The London Spy (1698–1709), Part 5

From thence we turned through the West Gate of St Paul's Churchyard, where we saw a parcel⁷² of stone-cutters and sawyers so very hard at work that, I protest, notwithstanding the vehemency of their labour and the temperateness of the season, instead of using their handkerchiefs to wipe the sweat off their faces, they were most of them blowing their nails.⁷³ "Bless me!" said I to my friend, "sure, this church stands in a colder climate

⁷⁰ *in balneo*: in a bath (an alchemical term).

⁷¹ **the late Resident here**: the Venetian Paolo Sarotti, who was in London 1675–1681; he and his son Giovanni Sarotti, who was elected a Fellow in 1679, set up an academy in Venice with brief success.

⁷² **parcel**: group, bunch (contemptuous).

⁷³ **blowing their nails**: blowing on their fingers to warm them (since they are not being warmed by exercise).

than the rest of the nation, or else those fellows are of a strange constitution to seem ready to freeze at such warm exercise.” “You must consider,” says my friend, “this is work carried on at a national charge,⁷⁴ and ought not to be hastened on in a hurry, for the greatest reputation it will gain when it’s finished will be that it was so many years in building [...]”.

We went a little further, where we observed ten men in a corner, very busy about two men’s work, taking as much care that everyone should have his due proportion of the labour, as so many thieves in making an exact division of their booty. The wonderful piece of difficulty the whole number had to perform was to drag along a stone of about three hundredweight in a carriage, in order to be hoisted upon the mouldings of the cupola, but were so fearful of dispatching this facile undertaking with too much expedition that they were longer in hauling on it half the length of the church than a couple of lusty porters, I am certain, would have been carrying it to Paddington without resting of their burden.

2.14 JOSEPH ADDISON: THE ROYAL EXCHANGE

Joseph Addison (1672–1719), poet, dramatist, essayist, and co-producer with Richard Steele of the immensely popular periodical The Spectator (1711–1712), expatiates on the wonders of the Royal Exchange. The Exchange was rebuilt in 1669 after the Great Fire and became one of the great business centres of the world: part market, part shopping-mall, part Stock Exchange. Addison writes with the expansiveness and patriotic fervour of Sir Roger de Coverley, a character who often appears in The Spectator, though he is not named here.

From The Spectator, No. 69 (19 May 1711)

There is no place in the town which I so much love to frequent as the Royal Exchange. It gives me a secret satisfaction, and in some measure gratifies my vanity as I am an Englishman, to see so rich an assembly of countrymen and foreigners consulting together upon the private business of mankind, and making this metropolis a kind of emporium for the whole earth. I must confess I look upon High Change⁷⁵ to be a great council, in which all considerable nations have their representatives. Factors [*agents*] in the trading world are what ambassadors are in the politic world: they negotiate affairs, conclude treaties, and maintain a good correspondence between those wealthy societies of men that are divided from one another by seas and oceans or live on the different extremities of a continent. I have often been pleased to hear disputes adjusted between an inhabitant of Japan and an alderman of London, or to see a subject of the Great Mogul⁷⁶ entering into a league with one of

⁷⁴at a national charge: There was a tax on coal to pay for the rebuilding.

⁷⁵High Change: the Exchange when trade is most active.

⁷⁶the Great Mogul: the emperor of Delhi, who ruled Hindustan in the north of the Indian subcontinent.

the Czar of Muscovy [*Russia*]. I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several ministers of commerce, as they are distinguished by their different walks⁷⁷ and different languages. Sometimes I am jostled among a body of Armenians; sometimes I am lost in a crowd of Jews; and sometimes make one in a group of Dutchmen. I am a Dane, Swede, or Frenchman at different times, or rather fancy myself like the old philosopher,⁷⁸ who upon being asked what countryman he was, replied that he was a citizen of the world.

2.15 NED WARD: CROWDS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE ROYAL EXCHANGE

Ned Ward (see [2.13 HN]) evokes something of the lively market in front of the Royal Exchange; he is less enchanted than Addison with its cosmopolitan crowds, describing “bum-firking Italians”, Dutchmen with “slovenly mien and swinish looks”, Frenchmen who “step a minuet as they walk”, and Spaniards who “stink as strong of garlic as a Bologna sausage”.

From The London Spy (1698–1709), Part 3

The pillars at the entrance of the front portico⁷⁹ were adorned with sundry memorandums [*reminders*] of old age, and infirmity, under which stood here and there a jack-in-the-box [*swindler*], like a parson in a pulpit, selling cures for your corns, glass eyes for the blind, ivory teeth for broken mouths, and spectacles for the weak-sighted; the passage to the gate being lined with hawkers, gardeners, mandrake-sellers⁸⁰ and porters. After we crowded a little way among this miscellaneous multitude we came to a pippin-monger’s [*fruit-seller’s*] stall, surmounted with [*overtopped by*] a chemist’s shop, where drops, elixirs, cordials and balsams had justly the prehemence [*pre-eminence*] of apples, chestnuts, pears and oranges (the former being ranked in as much order upon shelves, as books in a bishop’s library, and the latter being marshalled with as much exactness as an army ready to engage). [...]

We then proceeded and went on to the ’Change, turned to the right, and jostled in amongst a parcel of swarthy buggerantoes,⁸¹ preternatural⁸² fornicators (as my friend called them), who would ogle a handsome young man

⁷⁷walks: “each of the portions of the ambulatory [*arcade*] formerly allotted to different classes of merchants and designated by special names, as *East India*, *Virginia*, *Jamaica*, *Spanish walk*, etc.”, *OED* 10.b.

⁷⁸the old philosopher: Diogenes the Cynic (C4th BCE).

⁷⁹portico: the formal entrance, consisting of columns supporting a pediment.

⁸⁰mandrake-sellers: The ground-up root of *mandragora officinarum* was a soporific (and thought to promote fertility in women).

⁸¹swarthy buggerantoes: *swarthy* because they (and their tastes) are foreign (as opposed to *true-bred English whoremasters*). Ward may have coined the term *buggeranto*, which was “often used as a term of abuse applied to foreigners” (*OED*).

⁸²preternatural: sodomy was felt to be outside the ordinary course of nature.

with as much lust as a true-bred English whoremaster [*lecher*] would gaze upon a beautiful virgin. Advertisements hung as thick round the pillars of each walk as bells about the legs of a morris-dancer, and an incessant buzz, like the murmurs of the distant ocean, as a diapason⁸³ to our talk, like a drone⁸⁴ to a bagpipe. The wainscot was adorned with quacks' bills⁸⁵ instead of pictures; never an empiric⁸⁶ in the town, but had his name in a lacquered frame, containing a fair invitation for a fool and his money to be soon parted; thus he that wants physic for a clap,⁸⁷ or a wet-nurse for a child, may be furnished here at a minute's warning. After we had squeezed our way through a crowd of bum-firking⁸⁸ Italians, we fell into a throng of straitlaced⁸⁹ monsters in fur and thrum-caps,⁹⁰ with huge loggerheads,⁹¹ effeminate⁹² waists, and buttocks like a Flanders mare,⁹³ with slovenly mien, swinish looks, whose upper lips were gracefully adorned with turd-coloured⁹⁴ whiskers; these [...] were grunting⁹⁵ to each other, like hogs at their peas. These, my friend told me, were the water-rats⁹⁶ of Europe, who love nobody but themselves, and fatten upon the spoils, and build their own welfare upon the ruins of their neighbours.

2.16 DEFOE: WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Defoe remarks on several features of Westminster Abbey. The last that he mentions is still a subject of note at the present day.

⁸³**diapason**: a swelling sound.

⁸⁴**drone**: "the bass pipe of a bagpipe, which emits only one continuous tone" (*OED*).

⁸⁵**quacks' bills**: advertisements for medical charlatans.

⁸⁶**empiric**: fraudulent practitioner of what we would now call 'alternative medicine'.

⁸⁷**physic for a clap**: treatment for gonorrhœa, almost certainly worthless: as a physician wrote 150 years later, "We do not know of any substance, which, taken into the system, is an antidote to the infection of gonorrheal matter" (Bostwick 215).

⁸⁸**firking**: "beating, whipping" but also a fudged version of "fucking" (c.p. "gang bang," "knocking shop,"). They are thus practitioners either of flagellation (like the "flogging-cullies" Ward mentions in Part 2) or of anal sex, or perhaps both (both for Ward were "classes in the black-school of sodomy").

⁸⁹**straitlaced**: uncommunicative, morose (a stereotypical characteristic of the Dutch).

⁹⁰**thrum-caps**: coarse knitted woollen caps, as worn by Dutch sailors.

⁹¹**loggerheads**: heads disproportionately large; fools.

⁹²**effeminate**: self-indulgent, voluptuous.

⁹³**buttocks like a Flanders mare**: enormous buttocks. The Dutch were held to be gluttonous.

⁹⁴**turd-coloured**: because of all the snuff they take.

⁹⁵A caricature of the Dutch language to English ears.

⁹⁶**water-rats**: pirates (with a pun on the last syllable). Despite the current reign of the Dutch King William III (the nephew of Charles II), England and the Netherlands had traditionally been naval, colonial and mercantile rivals, who fought three wars between 1652 and 1674, both sides having resorted at times to piracy.

From A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724–1726), Vol. 2, Letter 2

The Abbey, or Collegiate Church of Westminster, stands next to this [*Westminster Hall*]; a venerable old pile of building it is indeed, but so old and weak that had it not been taken in hand some years ago, and great cost bestowed in upholding and repairing it,⁹⁷ we might, by this time, have called it a heap not a pile,⁹⁸ and not a church but the ruins of a church.

But it begins to stand upon new legs now, and as they continue to work upon the repairs of it, the face of the whole building will, in a short while, be entirely new.

This is the repository of the British kings and nobility, and very fine monuments are here seen over the graves of our ancient monarchs. The particulars are too long to enter into here and are so many times described by several authors that it would be a vain repetition to enter upon it here; besides, we have by no means any room for it.

The monarchs of Great Britain are always crowned here, even King James II⁹⁹ submitted to it, and to have it performed by a Protestant bishop. It is observable that our kings and queens make always two solemn visits to this church, and very rarely, if ever, come here any more, viz. to be crowned and to be buried.

Two things I must observe here, and with that I close the account of it. (1) 'Tis very remarkable that the royal vault, in which the English royal family was laid, was filled up with Queen Anne; so that just as the family was extinct above,¹⁰⁰ there was no room to have buried any more below. (2) It is become such a piece of honour to be buried in Westminster Abbey that the body of the church begins to be crowded with the bodies of citizens, poets, seamen, and parsons, nay, even with very mean persons, if they have but any way made themselves known in the world; so that in time the royal ashes will be thus mingled with common dust, that it will leave no room either for king or common people, or at least not for their monuments, some of which also are rather pompously foolish than solid and to the purpose.

⁹⁷**in upholding and repairing it:** Restoration work was undertaken 1698–1723 by Christopher Wren. Nicholas Hawksmoor designed the West Towers, which were not completed until 1745.

⁹⁸**pile:** a large imposing building.

⁹⁹**King James II:** the last Catholic monarch of England, 1685–1688 (see [2.6]).

¹⁰⁰**the family ... above:** Queen Anne died in 1714, her death ending the Stuart dynasty.

ALL THAT LIFE CAN AFFORD

2.17 SAMUEL JOHNSON IN PRAISE OF LONDON

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), one of the most brilliant English men of letters—biographer, lexicographer, poet, essayist, and dramatist—was a man of shrewd insight, opinionated, eccentric, but always humane, who gathered around him a large literary circle of like-minded people. He occasionally travelled abroad but always regarded London as his home. *James Boswell* (1740–1795) was his great friend and fellow-traveller and took great pains to record Johnson’s life in detail, writing with enthusiasm, and vitality. His celebrated *Life of Samuel Johnson* is written with the devotion and admiration of a close companion.

[5 July 1763] Talking of London, he observed, “Sir, if you wish to have a just notion of the magnitude of this city, you must not be satisfied with seeing its great streets and squares, but must survey the innumerable little lanes and courts. It is not in the showy evolutions of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists.”

[30 September 1769] Talking of a London life, he said, “The happiness of London is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it. I will venture to say, there is more learning and science within the circumference of ten miles from where we now sit, than in all the rest of the kingdom.” BOSWELL. “The only disadvantage is the great distance at which people live from one another.” JOHNSON. “Yes, Sir; but that is occasioned by the largeness of it, which is the cause of all the other advantages.”

[20 September 1777] I suggested a doubt, that if I were to reside in London, the exquisite zest with which I relished it in occasional visits might go off, and I might grow tired of it. JOHNSON. “Why, Sir, you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.”

[9 April 1778] [...] “A great city is, to be sure, the school for studying life; and ‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ as Pope observes” (see Pope 1966, 250).

2.18 JOHN GAY: THE LABYRINTHINE STREETS OF LONDON

John Gay (1685–1732), poet, dramatist, and prose writer, was best known for his ballad opera *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). He was a friend of Johnson, Pope, Swift, and other men of letters. In his *Trivia* his satirical view of London streets is markedly different from that of Johnson, who much enjoyed London’s “innumerable little lanes and courts” [2.17]. *The Seven Dials* was the junction of seven streets meeting in a circular piazza in the centre of which was a Doric column with clock faces. It was designed in 1693 to be an affluent residential area (it is near Covent Garden), but became a haunt of criminals and sex-workers, who met in its many taverns.

From *Trivia, or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London (1716), Bk 2*

Where fam'd Saint Giles's ancient limits spread,
 An inrail'd¹⁰¹ column rears its lofty head.
 Here to seven streets, seven dials [*clocks*] count the day,
 And from each other catch the circling ray.
 Here oft the peasant, with enquiring face,
 Bewilder'd, trudges on from place to place;
 He dwells on every sign with stupid [*stupefied*] gaze,
 Enters the narrow alley's doubtful maze,
 Tries every winding court and street in vain,
 And doubles o'er his weary steps again.
 Thus hardy Theseus,¹⁰² with intrepid feet,
 Travers'd the dang'rous Labyrinth of Crete;
 But still the wand'ring passes forced his stay,¹⁰³
 Till Ariadne's clue¹⁰⁴ unwinds the way.
 But do not thou, like that bold chief, confide [*trust*]
 Thy vent'rous footsteps to a female guide;
 She'll lead thee, with delusive smiles along,
 Dive in thy fob,¹⁰⁵ and drop thee in the throng.

2.19 GAY ON PALL MALL

John Gay [2.19 HN], in his mock-Georgic poem Trivia, does not confine his warnings to the slums of London, but sketches the bazards of walking even in fashionable Pall Mall with its expensive shops and aristocratic residences. The name derives from the Italian game palla-maglio ('ball-mallet'), also called 'pell mell,' which was played mainly by the upper classes in the street that was especially laid out for it in the seventeenth century, and which was consequently blocked to wheeled traffic.

From *Trivia, or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London (1716), Bk 2*

¹⁰¹**inrailed:** enclosed by railings.

¹⁰²**Theseus:** mythical founder of Athens. He entered the baffling maze or 'Labyrinth' of Crete to slay its occupant, the Minotaur, a fearsome bull-man monster to whom Athenian virgins were being sacrificed.

¹⁰³**wandering passes forced his stay:** winding passages brought him to a halt.

¹⁰⁴**clue:** or 'clew'; a ball of yarn or thread. The Cretan princess **Ariadne** gave **Theseus** a ball of thread with which (by unravelling it) he traced his way into (and thus safely out of) the Labyrinth. This story is the origin of the modern sense of *clue* as "guide, pointer, hint."

¹⁰⁵**fob:** "A small pocket formerly made in the waistband of the breeches and used for carrying a watch, money, or other valuables" (*OED*).

O bear me to the paths of fair Pell Mell,
 Safe are thy pavements, grateful [*pleasing*] is thy smell!
 At distance, rolls along the gilded coach,
 Nor sturdy carmen [*carters*] on thy walks encroach;
 No lets [*hindrances*] would bar thy ways, were chairs¹⁰⁶ denied –
 The soft supports of Laziness and Pride;
 Shops breath perfumes, through sashes ribbons glow,
 The mutual arms of ladies and the beau.
 Yet still even here, when rains the passage hide,
 Oft the loose stone spirts up a muddy tide
 Beneath thy careless foot; and from on high,
 Where masons mount the ladder, fragments fly;
 Mortar and crumbled lime in showers descend,
 And o'er thy head destructive tiles impend [*hang*].

2.20 JONATHAN SWIFT: “A DESCRIPTION OF A CITY SHOWER”

This poem by Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) is a mock-Georgic skit on London life in London weather. Swift was the great satirist of his age. He was born in Ireland, where he was ordained and eventually became Dean of St Patrick’s (1713). He was a prolific writer, particularly on politics and matters relating to the Church and Ireland. He spent much time among fellow writers both in Dublin and London, where together with Pope, Gay, and others, he founded the Scriblerus Club. His poem has none of the savage indignation of his Gulliver’s Travels (1726) or A Modest Proposal (1729); however, it shows a wry observation that places it firmly in the field of comic satire.

From The Tatler (1710), No. 238

Careful observers may foretell the hour
 (By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower.
 While rain depends [*impends*], the pensive cat gives o’er
 Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more.
 Returning home at night, you’ll find the sink [*open sewer*]
 Strike your offended sense with double stink.
 If you be wise, then go not far to dine,
 You’ll spend in coach-hire more than save in wine.¹⁰⁷
 A coming shower your shooting corns presage,

¹⁰⁶**chairs:** sedan chairs, enclosed litters carried on horizontal poles by two bearers; they were either private (a lady could be carried about the crowded streets in privacy and cleanliness by her servants) or for public hire. As status-symbols they were **supports of ... Pride**, having right of way over mere pedestrians.

¹⁰⁷**save in wine:** i.e. more than the money you save on wine (as someone else’s guest) will be spent on a coach to transport you through the rain.

Old achës¹⁰⁸ throb, your hollow tooth will rage.
 Saunt’ring in coffee-house is Dullman seen;
 He damns the climate and complains of spleen.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled¹¹⁰ wings,
 A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,
 That swill’d more liquor than it could contain,
 And like a drunkard gives it up again.
 Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,
 While the first drizzling shower is born aslope;
 Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean [*busy*]
 Flirts [*flicks*] on you from her mop, but not so clean.
 You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop
 To rail [*protest*]; she singing, still whirls on her mop.
 Not yet the dust had shunned th’unequal strife,
 But aided by the wind, fought still for life,
 And wafted with its foe by violent gust,
 ’Twas doubtful which was rain, and which was dust.
 Ah, where must needy poet seek for aid,
 When dust and rain at once his coat invade?
 His only coat, where dust confus’d with rain
 Roughen the nap,¹¹¹ and leave a mingled stain.

Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down,
 Threat’ning with deluge this devoted [*doomed*] town.
 To shops in crowds the daggled [*bespattered*] females fly,
 Pretend to cheapen [*bargain for*] goods, but nothing buy.
 The templar¹¹² spruce, while every spout’s abroad, [*is emitting water*]
 Stays till ’tis fair, yet seems to call a coach.
 The tucked-up sempstress walks with hasty strides,
 While streams run down her oiled umbrella’s sides.
 Here various kinds by various fortunes led,
 Commence acquaintance underneath a shed.
 Triumphant Tories, and desponding Whigs,¹¹³
 Forget their feuds, and join to save their wigs.
 Boxed in a chair¹¹⁴ the beau impatient sits,

¹⁰⁸**aches**: pronounced “aitches” in C18th.

¹⁰⁹**spleen**: a kind of fashionable melancholy or “nerves”.

¹¹⁰**South ... dabbled**: south wind ... wetted by splashing.

¹¹¹**Roughen the nap**: make the fibres on the surface of the coat stand up.

¹¹²**templar**: law student at the Inns of Court (the Middle Temple or the Inner Temple [3.28, n.93]); he **seems to call a coach** yet cannot afford one and must wait for the rain to stop.

¹¹³**Triumphant ... Whigs**: The **Tories** won the general election in 1710; Swift had by this time become a Tory.

¹¹⁴**Boxed in a chair**: enclosed in a sedan (see [2.19], n.106).

While spouts run clatt'ring o'er the roof by fits;
 And ever and anon with frightful din
 The leather¹¹⁵ sounds; he trembles from within.
 So when Troy chair men bore the wooden steed,
 Pregnant with Greeks, impatient to be freed;
 (Those bully Greeks who, as the moderns do,
 Instead of paying chair-men run them through).
 Laocoon struck the outside with his spear,
 And each imprisoned hero quak'd for fear.¹¹⁶

Now from all parts the swelling kennels [*gutters*] flow,
 And bear their trophies with them as they go:
 Filth of all hues and odours, seem to tell
 What street they sail'd from, by their sight and smell.
 They, as each torrent drives, with rapid force
 From Smithfield or St Pulchre's shape their course,
 And in huge confluent joined at Snow Hill ridge,
 Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn bridge.¹¹⁷
 Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
 Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drench'd in mud,
 Dead cats, and turnip-tops, come tumbling down the flood.

2.21 TOBIAS SMOLLETT: RANELAGH AND VAUXHALL GARDENS

These were the two major pleasure gardens in or near London. Both were highly popular, with a rotunda in which concerts were held, a Chinese pavilion, ornamental pond, firework displays and other entertainments. Both had many walks, lit (and unlit) after dark, and were notable for the opportunities they provided for open and covert love-making. Vauxhall, the older of the two, was established in the mid-1650s. It was accessible only by river until 1750 and had a slightly less respectable clientele. Ranelagh, in Chelsea, which opened in 1742, was the more fashionable and was well-known for the patronage of the aristocracy as well as having broad popular appeal.

¹¹⁵leather: roof of the sedan-chair.

¹¹⁶So when ... for fear: Referring to the Greek warriors in the Trojan War huddled inside their wooden horse, waiting to be let out; **Laocoon**, a Trojan prince, tried to dissuade the Trojans from admitting the horse and flung his spear at it; see Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.13–56. **bully ... moderns do**: The heroic **Greeks** are ironically likened to the contemporary ruffians (known as Mohocks) who terrorised the London streets.

¹¹⁷each torrent drives ... **Holborn** bridge: Drains from **Smithfield** meat market (see **General Introduction**, n.5) met those from the area around **St Sepulchre's** Church (see [2.28], n.137), running down **Snow Hill**, at **Holborn Bridge** (which spanned the Fleet River), and thence to the Thames.

Tobias Smollett (1721–1771) in Humphry Clinker (1771) gives two opposing views of the pleasure grounds—that of the elderly, crusty, intemperate Matthew Bramble juxtaposed with that of his niece Lydia, who regards the pleasure gardens with youthful vivacity and enthusiasm.

From The Expedition of Humphry Clinker. 2nd ed. 3 vols. (1771), Vol. 1

To Dr Lewis [from Matt. Bramble, London, 29 May]

The diversions of the times are not ill suited to the genius of this incongruous monster called ‘the public.’ Give it noise, confusion, glare, and glitter; it has no idea of elegance and propriety. What are the amusements at Ranelagh? One half of the company are following one another’s tails in an eternal circle, like so many blind asses in an olive-mill, where they can neither discourse, distinguish, nor be distinguished; while the other half are drinking hot water under the denomination of tea, till nine or ten o’clock at night to keep them awake for the rest of the evening. As for the orchestra, the vocal music especially, it is well for the performers that they cannot be heard distinctly. Vauxhall is a composition of baubles, overcharged with paltry ornaments, ill conceived, and poorly executed, without any unity of design or propriety of disposition. It is an unnatural assembly of objects, fantastically illuminated in broken masses, seemingly contrived to dazzle the eyes and divert the imagination of the vulgar—here a wooden lion, there a stone statue; in one place a range of things like coffee-house boxes, covered a-top; in another, a parcel of alehouse benches; in a third, a puppet show representation of a tin cascade; in a fourth, a gloomy cave of a circular form, like a sepulchral vault half lighted; in a fifth, a scanty slip of grass-plot that would not afford pasture sufficient for an ass’s colt. The walks, which nature seems to have intended for solitude, shade, and silence, are filled with crowds of noisy people, sucking up the nocturnal rheums of an aguish climate; and through these gay scenes a few lamps glimmer like so many farthing candles.

To Miss Lætitia Willis, at Gloucester [from Lydia Melford, London, 31 May]

Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding, enlightened with a 1000 golden lamps that emulate the noonday sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair; glittering with cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones. While these exulting sons and daughters of felicity tread this round of pleasure, or regale, in different parties and separate lodges, with fine imperial tea and other delicious refreshments, their ears are entertained with the most ravishing delights of music, both instrumental and vocal. There I heard the famous Tenducci,¹¹⁸ a thing from Italy—it looks for all the world like a man, though they say it is not.

¹¹⁸**Tenducci:** Giusto Fernando Tenducci (?1736–1790), Italian-born castrato who sang opera in London and elsewhere.

The voice, to be sure, is neither man's nor woman's, but it is more melodious than either, and it warbled so divinely that while I listened I really thought myself in paradise.

At nine o'clock, in a charming moonlight evening we embarked at Ranelagh for Vauxhall in a wherry,¹¹⁹ so light and slender that we looked like so many fairies sailing in a nutshell [...] The pleasure of this little excursion was, however, damped by my being sadly frightened at our landing, where there was a terrible confusion of wherries and a crowd of people bawling, and swearing, and quarrelling; nay, a parcel of ugly-looking fellows came running into the water and laid hold on our boat with great violence to pull it ashore; nor would they quit their hold till my brother struck one of them over the head with his cane. But this flutter was fully recompensed by the pleasures of Vauxhall, which I no sooner entered than I was dazzled and confounded with the variety of beauties that rushed all at once upon my eye. Image to yourself, my dear Letty, a spacious garden, part laid out in delightful walks, bounded with high hedges and trees, and paved with gravel; part exhibiting a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottoes, lawns, temples, and cascades, porticoes, colonnades, and rotundas, adorned with pillars, statues, and painting, the whole illuminated with an infinite number of lamps, disposed in different figures of suns, stars, and constellations; the place crowded with the gayest company, ranging through those blissful shades, or supping in different lodges on cold collations, enlivened with mirth, freedom, and good humour, and animated by an excellent band of music. Among the vocal performers I had the happiness to hear the celebrated Mrs—, whose voice was so loud and so shrill that it made my head ache through excess of pleasure.

2.22 HANNAH MORE: THE BLUESTOCKING CIRCLE

*The Circle was an informal social, educational, and philanthropic organization established in the mid eighteenth century to cultivate intellectual pursuits, mainly among women, to patronize the arts in particular, and culture in general. Meetings were held at the home of Elizabeth Montagu (1720–1800), a wealthy woman who was its dominant figure. Those who were stimulated by the group's conversations and activities were Frances (Fanny) Burney (1752–1840), Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), Sarah Fielding (1710–1768), **Hannah More** (1745–1833), and Hester Thrale (Piozzi) (1741–1821). The Circle was not confined to women: Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, and Sir Joshua Reynolds were also members. The writings of the women were mainly philosophical, religious, moral, and classical (in the form of translations). Some were poems and plays but virtually none had London life as its subject. (A notable exception is Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, a novel set mainly in London and including a scene in Vauxhall Gardens [2.21].)*

¹¹⁹a wherry: “a light rowing-boat used chiefly on rivers to carry passengers” (OED).

Here, *Hannah More* writes effusively to one of her four sisters on her introduction to Elizabeth Montagu's imposing salon. Her account gives an insight into the tenor of its meetings. The letter was first published in *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Hannah More*, ed. William Roberts (1834).

London, 1775

Mrs Montagu received me with the most encouraging kindness; she is not only the finest genius, but the finest lady I ever saw. She lives in the highest style of magnificence; her apartments and table are in the most splendid taste; but what baubles are these when speaking of a Montagu! Her form (for she has no *body*) is delicate even to fragility; her countenance the most animated in the world; the sprightly vivacity of fifteen, with the judgement and experience of a Nestor.¹²⁰ But I fear she is hastening to decay very fast; her spirits are so active that they must soon wear out the little frail receptacle that holds them. Mrs Carter has in her person a great deal of what the gentlemen mean when they say such a one is a 'poetical lady'; however, independently of her great talents and learning, I like her much; she has affability, kindness, and goodness, and I honour her heart even more than her talents. But I do not like one of them better than Mrs Boscawen¹²¹; she is at once polite, learned, judicious, and humble; and Mrs Palk tells me, her letters are thought not inferior to Mrs Montagu's. She regretted (so did I) that so many suns could not possibly shine at one time; but we are to have a smaller party, where, from fewer luminaries, there may emanate a clearer, steadier, and more beneficial light. Dr Johnson asked me how I liked the new tragedy of *Braganza*.¹²² I was afraid to speak before them all, as I knew a diversity of opinion prevailed among the company: however, as I thought it a less evil to dissent from the opinion of a fellow creature than to tell a falsity, I ventured to give my sentiments, and was satisfied with Johnson's answering, "You are right, madam."

2.23 NED WARD: PORK SELLERS AT BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

Ned Ward and his friend, on one of their tours of inspection of lower-class London life, examine what is on offer at Pie Corner, a popular part of Bartholomew Fair, where roast pork is sold. See [1.23 HN] for a note on Bartholomew Fair; see [2.14 HN] for a note on Ned Ward.

From The London Spy (1698–1709), Part 10

[... W]e after a short consultation, agreed to gratify our importunate appetites with a quarter of a pig on purpose to be fools in fashion. In order to accomplish our design, with a great deal of elbow labour and much sweating

¹²⁰**Nestor**: an elderly counsellor to Agamemnon in the *Iliad*.

¹²¹**Mrs Boscawen**: Frances Boscawen (?1722–1805), one of the Circle's hostesses.

¹²²**Braganza**: a tragedy by Robert Jephson (1736–1803) first performed in February 1775.

we scrambled though the throng who came pouring into the Fair from all adjacent streets; each stream of rabble contending to repel the force of its opposite current, who were striving, like tide and stream, to overcome each other. At last, with as much difficulty as a hunted buck gets through a wood with his horns on, by inch and inch we gained Pie Corner, where cooks stood dripping at their doors like their roasted swine's flesh at their fires, with painful industry each setting forth with an audible voice the choice and excellency of his pig and pork, which were running as merrily round upon the spit as if they were striving who should be first roasted. Some pigs hanging upon renters [*meat-hooks*] in the shop windows as big as large spaniels, half-baked by the sunbeams, and looked as red as the thighs of a country milk-wench in a frosty morning. After we had gazed round us to examine what cook was most likely to accommodate our stomachs with good entertainment, at last we agreed to step into a large shop where we had great expectancy of tolerable meat and cleanly usage; but had no sooner entered the suffocating kitchen but a swingeing [*huge (slang)*] fat fellow, who was appointed overseer of the roast to keep the pigs from blistering, was standing by the spit in his shirt, rubbing of his ears, breast, neck, and armpits with the same wet cloth which he applied to his pigs, which brought such a qualm over my stomach that I had much ado to keep the stuffing of my guts from tumbling into the dripping-pan. So scouring out again, through an army of flies encamped at the door in order to attack the pig sauce, we deferred our eating till a cleaner opportunity.

2.24 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: "WORK, THE CURSE OF THE DRINKING CLASSES"

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and was apprenticed as a printer. In 1724 he travelled to England where he worked in a London printing house. He returned to Philadelphia in 1726 and set up his own press. He gained esteem as a writer, especially through Poor Richard's Almanack (1733–1758), and was influential in American public affairs, helping to draft the Declaration of Independence. In 1757 he travelled to England again and was on friendly terms with Burke, Hume, Adam Smith and Priestley. His Autobiography was published posthumously in 1793.

From Autobiography (1793), ch. 6

I now began to think of getting a little money beforehand, and, expecting better work, I left Palmer's¹²³ to work at Watts's,¹²⁴ near Lincoln's Inn Fields, a still greater printing-house. Here I continued all the rest of my stay in London.

¹²³Palmer's: Samuel Palmer 1695–1732, printer in Bartholomew Close.

¹²⁴Watts's: John Watts, died 1762, printer at Wild Court.

At my first admission into this printing-house I took to working at press,¹²⁵ imagining I felt a want of the bodily exercise I had been used to in America, where presswork is mixed with composing.¹²⁶ I drank only water; the other workmen, near fifty in number, were great guzzlers of beer. On occasion, I carried up and down stairs a large form of types in each hand, when others carried but one in both hands. They wondered to see, from this and several instances, that the *Water-American*, as they called me, was *stronger* than themselves, who drank *strong* beer!¹²⁷ We had an alehouse boy who attended always in the house to supply the workmen. My companion at the press drank every day a pint before breakfast, a pint at breakfast with his bread and cheese, a pint between breakfast and dinner [*lunch*], a pint at dinner, a pint in the afternoon about six o'clock, and another when he had done his day's work. I thought it a detestable custom; but it was necessary, he supposed, to drink *strong* beer, that he might be *strong* to labour. I endeavoured to convince him that the bodily strength afforded by beer could only be in proportion to the grain or flour of the barley dissolved in the water of which it was made; that there was more flour in a pennyworth of bread; and therefore, if he would eat that with a pint of water, it would give him more strength than a quart of beer. He drank on, however, and had four or five shillings to pay out of his wages every Saturday night for that muddling liquor; an expense I was free from. And thus these poor devils keep themselves always under.

Watts, after some weeks, desiring to have me in the composing-room, I left the pressmen; a new *bienvenu*¹²⁸ or sum for drink, being five shillings, was demanded of me by the compositors. I thought it an imposition, as I had paid below; the master thought so too, and forbade my paying it. I stood out two or three weeks, was accordingly considered as an excommunicate, and had so many little pieces of private mischief done me, by mixing my sorts, transposing my pages, breaking my matter, etc., etc., if I were ever so little out of the room, and all ascribed to the chapel¹²⁹ ghost, which they said ever haunted those not regularly admitted, that, notwithstanding the master's protection, I found myself obliged to comply and pay the money, convinced of the folly of being on ill terms with those one is to live with continually.

I was now on a fair footing with them, and soon acquired considerable influence. I proposed some reasonable alterations in their chapel laws, and carried them against all opposition. From my example, a great part of them

¹²⁵**working at press:** mechanically operating the machine that presses the inked type onto the paper.

¹²⁶**composing:** the fiddly but less strenuous work of assembling metal type into rows in the **forms** or wooden cases.

¹²⁷**strong beer:** as opposed to 'small beer,' a weaker beverage that could be drunk all day without impairment. In 1770 Britain brewed over 80 million gallons of small beer, about fourteen gallons for every man, woman and child.

¹²⁸**bienvenu:** "A fee exacted from a new workman" (*OED*).

¹²⁹**chapel:** association or union of workers in a printing workshop.

left their muddling breakfast of beer, and bread, and cheese, finding they could with me be supplied from a neighbouring house with a large porringer [*bowl*] of hot water-gruel, sprinkled with pepper, crumbed with bread, and a bit of butter in it, for the price of a pint of beer, viz., three half-pence. This was a more comfortable as well as cheaper breakfast, and keep their heads clearer. Those who continued sotting [*getting drunk*] with beer all day, were often, by not paying, out of credit at the alehouse, and used to make interest with me to get beer; their *light*, as they phrased it, *being out*. I watched the pay-table on Saturday night, and collected what I stood engaged for them, having to pay sometimes near thirty shillings a week on their accounts. This, and my being esteemed a pretty good *riggite*, that is, a jocular verbal satirist, supported my consequence in the society. My constant attendance (I never making a St. Monday)¹³⁰ recommended me to the master; and my uncommon quickness at composing occasioned my being put upon all work of dispatch,¹³¹ which was generally better paid. So I went on now very agreeably.

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

2.25 JOHN GAY: PERILS OF LONDON BY NIGHT

John Gay warns against walking the London streets by night. For a note on Gay and his Trivia (1716), see [2.19 HN].

From Trivia, or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London (1716), Bk 3

Though you through cleaner alleys wind by day,
To shun the hurries of the public way,
Yet ne'er to those dark paths by night retire;
Mind only safety, and condemn the mire.
Then no impervious courts thy haste detain,
Nor sneering ale-wives bid thee turn again.

Where Lincoln's Inn, wide space,¹³² is rail'd around
Cross not with vent'rous step; there oft is found
The lurking thief, who while the daylight shone
Made the walls echo with his begging tone;
That crutch which late compassion mov'd shall wound
Thy bleeding head and fell thee to the ground.
Though thou art tempted by the link man's call,¹³³

¹³⁰**St. Monday:** An absentee from work on a Monday.

¹³¹**work of dispatch:** urgent business.

¹³²**Lincoln's Inn, wide space:** Lincoln's Inn Fields was for centuries London's largest square. While there were fashionable houses beyond its surrounding railings, robbers and petty criminals made the open space unsafe.

¹³³**link man's call:** men with torches offered to light people's way in dark areas for a fee.

Yet trust him not along the lonely wall;
 In the mid-way he'll quench the flaming brand,
 And share the booty with the pilf'ring band.
 Still keep the public streets, where oily rays
 Shot from the crystal lamp o'erspread the ways.

2.26 JAMES SMITH: SEX-WORKERS IN THE STRAND

In a poem by James Smith, inspired by John Gay's Trivia, London's pleasures and vices are surveyed discursively, with attention paid to eating houses, inns, theatres, as well as the more salacious side of London night-life. The Strand was well known in the eighteenth century for its sex-workers and petty criminals. Almost nothing is known of James Smith, except that he lived in Tewkesbury (dates unknown). His poem was evidently popular as it appeared in two further editions after 1768.

The Art of Living in London (1768), Canto 2

As through the streets, O Virtue, as I go,
 Shield me from one that's equally my foe;
 Who *cap-à-pie*, like Hamlet's ghost now stalks,
 And makes "night hideous" by her nightly walks.¹³⁴
 How can the Muse without a sigh proclaim,
 And tell that "woman" is this monster's¹³⁵ name;
 Woman, man's chiefest good, by Heaven design'd
 To glad the heart, and humanize the mind;
 To soothe each angry care, abate each strife,
 And lull the passions as we walk through life;
 But fall'n from such a height, so very low,
 She now has nothing but her form to show;
 A scandal to that sex she was before;
 Each grace polluted by the name of W—e.

How shall I speak of all the various arts
 She nightly uses to entrap our hearts?
 How shall I paint the loose, familiar airs,
 Affected speeches, and immodest leers
 Of all these midnight daughters as they stand,
 In shameless groups along the lengthened Strand?
 Lost to all thought – remote from every sense
 Of female decency or innocence;
 Disrob'd of all restraint or modest port,
 Here Prostitution holds her public court.

¹³⁴Who *cap-à-pie* ... walks: in her alluring make-up and attire she is like Hamlet's father's ghost, who is armed for combat *cap-à-pie* ("from head to foot", *Hamlet* 1.2.200), and whose walking makes "night hideous" (1.4.54).

¹³⁵monster: unnatural creature.

With flaunting strides, and affectation's eye,
 Behold these sycophants in love pass by [...]
 O! purchased love, retail'd through all the town,
 Where each may share on paying half a crown¹³⁶;
 Where every air of tenderness is art,
 And not one word, the language of the heart;
 Where all this mockery of Cupid's reign
 Ends in remorse, in wretchedness, and pain [*i.e. of venereal disease*].

2.27 DANIEL DEFOE ON SHOPLIFTING

Daniel Defoe's heroine Moll Flanders, after a series of unfortunate marriages, becomes bankrupt and impoverished to the point of despair. She succumbs to shoplifting and a life of thieving. This episode graphically describes her initial temptation to steal.

From The Fortune and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1722)

Wandering thus about I knew not whither, I passed by an apothecary's shop in Leadenhall Street, where I saw lie on a stool just before the counter a little bundle wrapped in a white cloth; beyond it stood a maidservant with her back to it, looking up towards the top of the shop, where the apothecary's apprentice, as I suppose, was standing up on the counter, with his back also to the door and a candle in his hand, looking and reaching up to the upper shelf for something he wanted, so that both were engaged, and nobody else in the shop.

This was the bait, and the Devil, who laid the snare, prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it; 'twas like a voice spoken over my shoulder, "Take the bundle; be quick; do it this moment." It was no sooner said but I stepped into the shop, and with my back to the wench, as if I had stood up for a cart that was going by, I put my hand behind me and took the bundle and went off with it, the maid or fellow not perceiving me, or anyone else.

It is impossible to express the horror of my soul all the while I did it. When I went away I had no heart to run, or scarce to mend my pace; I crossed the street indeed and went down the first turning I came to, and I think it was a street that went through into Fenchurch Street; from thence I crossed and turned through so many ways and turnings that I could never tell which way it was, nor where I went. I felt not the ground I stepped on, and the farther I was out of danger the faster I went, till tired and out of breath, I was forced to sit down on a little bench at a door, and then found I was got into Thames Street near Billingsgate. I rested me a little and went on; my blood was all in a fire, my heart beat as if I was in a sudden fright. In short, I was under such a surprise that I knew not whither I was going, or what to do.

¹³⁶**half a crown:** two shillings and sixpence, or about £15 in 2018 terms.

2.28 DEFOE: NEWGATE PRISON

There was a prison of some kind on Newgate St for eight centuries, from 1188 to 1902 (when it was demolished to accommodate the enlarged Central Criminal Court or Old Bailey). The prison Defoe knew had been rebuilt (after the Great Fire) in 1672, magnificent without and miserable within; it was burned down again during the Gordon Riots [2.31] and subsequently rebuilt. From all accounts prison conditions were as appalling in the early eighteenth century as they were 100 years earlier when John Earle was writing (see [1.17]). As then, the degree of discomfort you endured was proportional to your ability to pay the gaolers; those who could pay nothing were confined to “The Stone Hold, a most terrible stinking, dark and dismal Place, situated under Ground, in which no Day-light can come, [...] paved with Stone, on which the Prisoners lie without any Beds”. (Langley, 42).

Newgate housed all kinds of criminals, including those awaiting execution. Defoe’s Moll Flanders would have been incarcerated with the worst offenders, since she had been sentenced to hanging. Defoe himself was in Newgate in 1703 for seditious libel, but his quarters were rather more comfortable: he was solvent and had many friends. Destitute prisoners, like Moll, who were unable to bribe the warders for better conditions had to endure the utmost misery of filth, disease, and privation. Moll describes her entry into Newgate, and a day of executions.

From The Fortune and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1722)

I was now fixed indeed. ’Tis impossible to describe the terror of my mind when I was first brought in, and when I looked round upon all the horrors of that dismal place I looked on myself as lost, and that I had nothing to think of but of going out of the world, and that with the utmost infamy. The hellish noise, the roaring, swearing, and clamour, the stench, and nastiness, and all the dreadful afflicting things that I saw there joined to make the place seem an emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of an entrance into it [...]

[... T]he next morning there was a sad scene indeed in the prison. The first thing I was saluted with in the morning was the tolling of the great bell at St Sepulchre’s,¹³⁷ which ushered in the day. As soon as it began to toll, a dismal groaning and crying was heard from the Condemned Hole, where there lay six poor souls who were to be executed that day, some for one crime, some for another, and two for murder.

This was followed by a confused clamour in the house among the several prisoners, expressing their awkward sorrows for the poor creatures that were to die, but in a manner extremely differing one from another. Some cried for them; some brutishly huzzaed and wished them a good journey; some damned and cursed those that had brought them to it; many pitying them; and some few, but very few, praying for them.

¹³⁷St Sepulchre’s-without-Newgate was a large Gothic church just outside the city wall, near Newgate. These “bells of Old Bailey” tolled as the condemned were escorted to Tyburn [2.29 HN].

2.29 SAMUEL RICHARDSON: AN EXECUTION AT TYBURN

The novelist (and former London printer) **Samuel Richardson** (1689–1761) published in 1739 a collection of sample letters to provide helpful models for the diffident correspondent; letter 4.38 is “from a person in town to his brother in the country, describing a public execution at Tyburn”.

Execution-days, which happened eight times a year, were public holidays, to allow the edifying spectacle to be appreciated by as many as possible; the condemned prisoners, accompanied by a lively and oddly festive crowd of friends and relations, spectators and body-snatchers, were conveyed in a cart from Newgate Prison [2.29 HN], where the Old Bailey now stands, some four-and-a-half miles north-eastward to the gallows in the village of Tyburn, where the Edgware Rd meets Bayswater Rd, near what is now Marble Arch. The gruesome monthly festival widely known as ‘Tyburn Fair’ was hugely popular: some 30,000 people witnessed an execution in 1776.¹³⁸ Because of the dangerous size of these boisterous crowds, in 1783 executions were moved to Newgate.

Tyburn Tree, it was popularly called, was the first permanent gallows in London (erected in 1571), a large tripod-shaped structure, 18 feet high, capable of accommodating 21 victims at a time, seven on each limb of the triangular frame. The sufferers were attached to the crossbeam by a rope around the neck while standing in the cart; the cart then moved away and they were left to strangle slowly under their own weight, though friends and relatives might expedite the grisly process by pulling on their legs.

From The Complete Letter-Writer: Or, Polite English Secretary (8th edition, 1762), pp. 207–9

That I might better view the prisoners, and escape the pressure of the mob, which is prodigious—nay, almost incredible—if we consider the frequency of these executions in London, which is once a month, I mounted my horse, and accompanied the melancholy cavalcade from Newgate to the fatal Tree. The criminals were five in number. I was much disappointed at the unconcern and carelessness that appeared in the faces of three of the unhappy wretches: the countenances of the other two were spread with that horror and despair which is not to be wondered at in men whose period is so near, with the terrible aggravation of its being hastened by their own voluntary indiscretion and misdeeds. The exhortation spoken by the bell-man,¹³⁹ from the wall of St Sepulchre’s churchyard, is well intended; but the noise of the officers, and the mob, was so great, and the silly curiosity of people climbing into the cart to take leave of the criminals made such a confused noise, that I could not hear the words of the exhortation when spoken, though they are as follow:

¹³⁸The figure is from Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law* (New York, 1948–1956), vol. I, p. 175, n.45.

¹³⁹**bell-man**: the clerk of St Sepulchre’s (see [2.28], n.137), known as the **bell-man**, was responsible for ringing a handbell outside the condemned prisoner’s cells the night before their execution, and chanting a poem to encourage penitent meditation (“Examine well yourselves: in time repent”).

All good people, pray heartily to God for the poor sinners who are now going to their deaths, for whom this great bell doth toll. You that are condemned to die, repent with lamentable tears. Ask mercy of the Lord for the salvation of your own souls, through the merit, death and passion of Jesus Christ, who now sits at the right hand of God, to make intercession for as many of you as penitently return unto him. *Lord have mercy upon you! Christ have mercy upon you!*

Which last words the bell-man repeats three times.

All the way up Holborn the crowd was so great as, at every twenty or thirty yards, to obstruct the passage; and wine [...] was brought the malefactors, who drank greedily of it, which I think did not suit well with their deplorable circumstances. After this, the three thoughtless young men, who at first seemed not enough concerned, grew most shamefully daring and wanton, behaving themselves in a manner which would have been ridiculous in men in any circumstance whatever: they swore, laughed, and talked obscenely, and wished their wicked companions good luck, with as much assurance as if their employment had been the most lawful.

At the place of execution, the scene grew still more shocking, and the clergyman who attended was more the subject of ridicule than their serious attention. The psalm was sung amidst the curses and quarrelling of hundreds of the most abandoned and profligate of mankind, upon whom [...] all the preparations of the unhappy wretches seemed only to serve for the subject of a barbarous kind of mirth, altogether inconsistent with humanity. And as soon as the poor creatures were half-dead, I was much surprised, before such a number of peace-officers,¹⁴⁰ to see the populace fall to pulling and hauling the carcasses with so much earnestness, as to occasion several warm rencounters and broken heads. These, I was told, were the friends of the persons executed, or such as (for the sake of tumult) chose to appear so, and some persons sent by private surgeons to obtain bodies for dissection. The contests between these were fierce and bloody, and frightful to look at, so that I made the best of my way out of the crowd, and with some difficulty, rode back among a large number of people, who had been upon the same errand with myself. The face of everyone spoke a kind of mirth, as if the spectacle they had beheld afforded pleasure instead of pain, which I am wholly unable to account for. [...] All was hurry and confusion, racket and noise, praying and oaths, swearing and singing of psalms. [...] In this, the behaviour of my countrymen is past accounting for, every street and lane I passed through bearing rather the face of a holiday, than of that sorrow which I expected to see for the untimely death of five members of the community.

¹⁴⁰peace-officers: parish officers or constables appointed to preserve the public peace.

One of their bodies was carried to the lodging of his wife, who not being in the way¹⁴¹ to receive it, they immediately hawked it about to every surgeon they could think of; and when none would buy it, they rubbed tar all over it,¹⁴² and left it in a field, hardly covered with earth.

2.30 SAMUEL JOHNSON: THE CRIME OF POVERTY

Samuel Johnson's poem London was adapted from the third Satire of Juvenal, retaining the latter's acrimonious tone but suiting it to what Johnson saw as the corruption, crime, avarice, malice, and other sins of London. In the city the "rabble rages" and ruffians lie in ambush; but Johnson's satire is mainly reserved for the wealthy and influential. He muses on the plight of the poor, who must suffer insults and the scorn of the insolent rich. The poem was praised at some length by Boswell in the year it was published.

From London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal (1738)

By numbers here from shame or censure free,
 All crimes are safe but hated poverty.
 This, only this, the rigid law pursues;
 This, only this, provokes the snarling Muse.
 The sober trader at a tatter'd cloak¹⁴³
 Wakes from his dream, and labours for a joke;
 With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,
 And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways.
 Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
 Sure, the most bitter is a scornful jest;
 Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
 Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.

Has Heaven reserv'd, in pity to the poor,
 No pathless waste, or undiscover'd shore?
 No secret island in the boundless main?
 No peaceful desert yet unclaim'd by Spain?
 Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,
 And bear oppression's insolence no more.
 This mournful truth is ev'rywhere confess'd,
 SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPRESS'D.
 But here more slow, where all are slaves to gold,
 Where looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold;
 Where won by bribes, by flatteries implor'd,
 The groom retails the favours of his lord.

¹⁴¹in the way: ready and/or willing.

¹⁴²Tar is a preservative and antiseptic: perhaps they were attempting to preserve the body in case the wife later decided to reclaim it.

¹⁴³at a tatter'd cloak: i.e. on seeing a sign of poverty.

2.31 THOMAS HOLCROFT: THE GORDON RIOTS

Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809), playwright and poet, was probably an eye witness of the Gordon Riots, a civil uprising that occurred in June 1780. It was initiated by Lord George Gordon (1751–1793), beginning as a peaceful protest to petition for repeal of the Papists Act of 1778, which had removed many of the legal constraints upon Catholics (they had been forbidden to keep schools, for example, or own land—or even a horse worth more than £5). The crowd gathered in St George’s Fields, Southwark, roughly 50,000 strong, to march to the Houses of Parliament. However, when it was clear that their protest was in vain, Gordon lost control of the demonstrators. The mob set alight to Roman Catholic chapels and residences, and broke into all the major prisons in London, freeing the prisoners. The Bank of England was attacked, and as the crowd grew more frenzied and anarchic, it determined to destroy all institutions, including royal palaces. Eventually martial law was declared, and the militia were ordered to fire on groups of rioters. By 9th June, a week after the insurgency began, and nearly 300 deaths, order was restored. Many ringleaders of the riot were hanged; Lord George Gordon was accused of high treason, but was acquitted. The graphic description of the riots by Thomas Holcroft, who wrote under the pseudonym “William Vincent of Gray’s Inn,” was one of the sources of Dickens’s coverage of the event in Barnaby Rudge (1841), ch. 64.

From A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Late Riots and Disturbances (1780)

[... O]n Friday, June 2nd at ten in the forenoon, an immense concourse assembled at the place appointed, some with serious intentions, some with wicked, and others out of curiosity, and notwithstanding the intense heat, which was that day very remarkable, kept parading the fields with their flags, singing hymns, marshalling themselves in ranks, and waiting for their leader. About eleven o’clock Lord George arrived among them and gave directions in what manner he would have them proceed, and about twelve (that the whole city might be convinced how serious the people were in their demands) one numerous party was ordered to go round over London Bridge, another over Blackfriars, and a third to follow him over Westminster. A huge roll of parchment, too, almost as much as a man could carry, containing the names of those who had signed the petition was borne before them. They proceeded with great decorum and decency on their route, and the whole body was assembled about half past two, before both Houses of Parliament,¹⁴⁴ on which occasion they gave a general shout.

But however peaceable and well-disposed some of them might be, it was very evident from the habit and appearance of numbers amongst them, that

¹⁴⁴From 1550 to 1834 the meeting place of the House of **Commons** was somewhat makeshift: the (deconsecrated) Royal Chapel of St Stephen in the palace of Westminster. The **Lords** met in the nearby White Chamber, in the cellars of which the Catholic would-be terrorist Guy Fawkes was arrested on November 5, 1605, curating dozens of barrels of gunpowder. In 1834 the buildings were destroyed by fire and replaced by the fine neo-Gothic edifice we are familiar with today.

order and regularity were not long to be expected from such an assembly; on the contrary, they soon began to exercise the most arbitrary and dictatorial power over both Lords and Commons. They obliged almost all the Members to put blue cockades in their hats, and call out, “No Popery!”. Some they compelled to take oaths to vote for the repeal of the obnoxious Act, and others they insulted in the most indecent and violent manner [...]

[... O]n Sunday in the afternoon, the rioters assembled in large bodies and attacked the chapels and dwelling houses of the Catholics in and about Moorfields. They stripped their houses of furniture, and their chapels, not only of the ornaments and insignia of religion, but tore up the altars, pulpits, pews, and benches, and made huge fires of them, leaving nothing but the bare walls, and in many places not even them. They publicly avowed their intention to root out Popery, to release those who had been confined in Newgate [2.29 HN] for their proceedings at the Sardinian and Warwick Street chapels on Friday, to pull down the houses of the justices who committed them, and the persons who gave evidence against them likewise [...]

[... T]hey came to Newgate, and publicly declared they would go and release the confined rioters. When they arrived at the doors of the prison, they demanded of Mr Akerman,¹⁴⁵ the keeper, to have their comrades immediately delivered up to them; and upon his persisting to do his duty by refusing, they began some to break the windows, some to batter the doors and entrances into the cells with pickaxes and sledgehammers, others with ladders to climb the vast walls, while others collected firebrands and whatever combustibles they could find, and flung into his dwelling house. What contributed more than anything to the spreading of the flames was the great quantity of household furniture belonging to Mr Akerman, which they threw out of the windows, piled up against the doors, and set fire to; the force of which presently communicated to the house, from the house to the chapel, and from thence, by the assistance of the mob, all through the prison. A party of constables, nearly to the amount of a hundred, came to the assistance of the keeper; these the mob made a lane for and suffered to pass till they were entirely encircled, when they attacked them with great fury, broke their staffs, and converted them into brands, which they hurled about wherever the fire, which was spreading very fast, had not caught. It is almost incredible to think that it were possible to destroy a building of such amazing strength and extent, with so much swiftness as they accomplished this [...]

As soon as the day was drawing towards a close, one of the most awful and dreadful spectacles this country ever beheld was exhibited. The mob had not only declared their resolution of firing the prisons and some private houses but had avowed their intention to destroy the Bank, Gray’s Inn, Temple, Lincoln’s Inn, the Grand Arsenal at Woolwich, and Royal Palaces.

¹⁴⁵**Mr Akerman:** Richard Akerman (?1722–1792) had been Head Gaoler of Newgate for many years. His humane treatment of prisoners was remarked on by Johnson and others in 1780.

A universal stupor had seized the minds of men. They looked at one another, and waited with a resigned consternation for the events which were to follow. Government indeed had exerted itself to the utmost, as far as their power, under the direction of the civil magistrate, would extend. Now, however, it was become necessary to make use of the royal prerogative and give discretionary powers to the military. Nothing could convey a more awful idea of the mischief which was dreaded than the strong guard which was placed in the Royal Exchange for the protection of the Bank, as nothing perhaps could have equalled the national desolation, had the diabolical purposes of the insurgents upon this place succeeded. Besides this, soldiers were distributed at Guildhall, in the Inns of Court, in almost every place tenable as a fortification, and in some private houses; and the cannon was disposed to the best advantage in the Park.¹⁴⁶

With minds thus predisposed to terror by so many objects of devastation, and in a city which but a few days before enjoyed the most perfect tranquillity, let those who were not spectators judge what the inhabitants felt when they beheld at the same instant the flames ascending and rolling in vast and voluminous clouds from the King's Bench and Fleet prisons, from New Bridewell,¹⁴⁷ from the toll gates on Blackfriar's Bridge, from houses in every quarter of the town, and particularly from the bottom and middle of Holborn, where the conflagration was horrible beyond description [...] Men, women, and children were running up and down with beds, glasses, bundles, or whatever they wished most to preserve. In streets where there were no fires, numbers were removing their goods and effects at midnight. The tremendous roar of the insatiate and innumerable fiends who were the authors of these horrible scenes, was heard at one instant, and at the next the dreadful report of soldiers' muskets, as if firing in platoons, and at various places. In short, everything which could impress the mind with ideas of universal anarchy and approaching desolation, seemed to be accumulating. Sleep and rest were things not thought of; the streets were swarming with people, and uproar, confusion, and terror reigned in every part.

It is hardly possible to collect in one point of view the havoc of this night. Had half the mischief the mob had threatened been effected, nothing less than national bankruptcy and destruction could have ensued. That they were prevented at those places on the safety of which the very existence of the empire might be said to depend, was owing not to their want of will but power and to the exertion of Government.

¹⁴⁶the Park: Hyde Park (see **Introduction 2**, n.2).

¹⁴⁷New Bridewell: a prison.

REFERENCES

- Boswell, James. *Boswell's Column: Being His Seventy Contributions to The London Magazine*, ed. Margaret Bailey. London: William Kimber, 1951.
- Cowles, Virginia. *The Great Swindle: The Story of the South Sea Bubble*. London: Harper, 1960.
- Fielding, Henry. *An Enquiry into the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751), in *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding*, Vol. 13, ed. W. E. Henley. London: Frank Cass, 1967.
- Gay, John. *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), in *Dramatic Works*, Vol. 2, ed. John Fuller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.
- Pope, Alexander. *Pope: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Davis. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Herbert Davis. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965.