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London (England), city, capital of the United Kingdom. It is situated in south-eastern England at the head of the River Thames estuary. Settled by the Romans as an important shipping point for crops and minerals, it gradually developed into the wealthy capital of a thriving industrial and agricultural nation. The expansion in the 19th century of the British Empire increased London's influence still further. Since World War II the city's prominence on the international stage has diminished, but it remains a flourishing financial centre and home to one of the world's most important stock exchanges. In addition, it is the foremost tourist destination in Britain, a centre of academic excellence, and one of the cultural capitals of the world—well deserving of the observation by Samuel Johnson that: "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".
The term "City of London", or "the City", is applied only to a small area known as the Square Mile (2.59 sq km/1 sq mi) that was the original settlement (ancient Londinium) and is now part of the financial and business district of the metropolis. The City of London and 32 surrounding boroughs constitute the Greater London metropolitan area, which covers some 1,580 sq km (620 sq mi). The 13 inner London boroughs are Camden, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, and the City of Westminster. The 19 outer boroughs are Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames, Sutton, and Waltham Forest.

Government and Administration

London is the seat of central government in Britain. The Houses of Parliament—the House of Commons (the lower house) and the House of Lords (the upper house)—are located at Westminster. Downing Street (home to the Prime Minister at No 10, and traditionally the Chancellor of the Exchequer, at No 11), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Treasury, and the Ministry of Defence are concentrated around Whitehall. Various other government departments and public bodies are also sited in central London. Within the Government, the Secretary of State for the Environment has responsibility for the capital as Minister for London. The administrative structure of the legal system, and the central offices of the main political parties, are also based in London.
Over 70 (out of 659) Members of Parliament are returned to Westminster from constituencies in the Greater London metropolitan area, and the capital returns 10 of England's 71 representatives to the European Parliament. Unlike other major cities, there is no single body governing Greater London. Prior to the late 1880s, when the London County Council (LCC) was established, the four counties of Essex, Kent, Middlesex, and Surrey administered the area, together with the ancient City of London and many smaller local authorities. In 1965 Greater London was created under the jurisdiction of the Greater London Council. This council was abolished in 1986, and today each inner and outer borough and the City of London itself has its own governing council. The borough councils consist of councillors elected every four years, who in turn annually elect their presiding official. Councils are responsible for the provision of most local services including education, housing, social services, local planning, roads, refuse collection, recreation, and culture. They do not control the police (except in the case of the City of London), fire service, or public transport. London's Metropolitan Police Service is the responsibility of the Home Secretary (a senior government minister). London Transport is a statutory corporation whose remit is to provide transport for the capital.
The City of London, the ancient heart of the city, has only about 5,000 residents (although well over 300,000 people work there each day). It is governed by the Corporation of the City of London. Among local authorities, the Corporation is unique; it is the oldest in the country and operates on a non-party-political basis. The ruling body is the Court of Common Council, and this consists of the Lord Mayor, 24 aldermen, and 130 common councilmen. The Lord Mayor and two sheriffs are nominated annually by the City guilds (livery companies representing trades and professions and dating back to medieval times) and elected by the Court of Aldermen. Aldermen and councilmen are elected by businesses in the City's 25 wards. The Corporation fulfils the same functions as the borough councils but has, for historical reasons,

retained some other powers: it is responsible for the City of London Police; is the health authority for the Port of London; is responsible for health control of animal imports throughout Greater London (including Heathrow Airport); and is responsible for the Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey).

Population Patterns and Trends

In mid-1994 the population of Greater London was estimated at 6,967,500 (representing about 12 per cent of Britain's overall population), with two thirds resident in outer London. Although the population is no longer as large as in mid-century (peaking at about 8,346,000 in the 1951 census), it has recently been increasing, rising at an average of 20,000 per year since 1984. London's population is heavily concentrated (at about 4,409 people per sq km/11,238 per sq mi) relative to other metropolitan areas in the country.

The arrival of immigrants has contributed considerably to the variations in population figures, and the capital is the most ethnically diverse region in the United Kingdom. Ethnic minority communities account for over a third of the population in the boroughs of Brent, Hackney, Newham, and Tower Hamlets.

The Urban Landscape

London straddles the River Thames, 80 km (50 mi) upriver from its mouth at the Nore, where the English Channel joins the North Sea. Most of London, including its central districts and the majority of its famous landmarks, lies to the north of the river. The original settlement that gave London its name was the Roman fort of Londinium, founded in the first century AD. The City of London is on the site where this stood, and the description of the Roman town as "a busy emporium for trade and traders" by the Roman historian Tacitus seems equally apt today. St Paul's Cathedral stands on the western edge of the City, and the Tower of London, the Norman fortress built by William the Conqueror to defend his new lands late in the 11th century (and now listed as a conservation site in the World Heritage List), lies to the south-east. Spanning the river to Southwark (west of Tower Bridge) is London Bridge, a modern replacement of the only bridge over the Thames in London until the 18th century.

To the east and north-east of the City are the predominantly working-class districts of the East End, home to successive waves of immigrants from Ireland, continental Europe, and the former British Empire. Lively and industrious, the East End continues to have many thriving small businesses. The area known as Docklands comprises (on the north bank of the Thames) the districts of Wapping and Poplar, the Isle of Dogs, the Royal Docks, and (to the south of the Thames) Surrey Docks. Docklands is the site of a massive inner city regeneration project. West of the City lie the ancient Inns of Court (Lincoln's Inn, Middle Temple, Inner Temple, and Gray's Inn), the legal district occupied by barristers and firms of solicitors; and Fleet Street, once the home of Britain's national press (which has now relocated to other parts of the capital). Further to the north-west is Bloomsbury, the haunt in the 1920s of a renowned group of literary intellectuals (the Bloomsbury Group), thanks to its proximity to London University and the British Museum.

The West End is a large area of central London to the west of the City, containing most of the best-known theatres and shopping districts. To the south, following the river as it takes a southward bend, is the administrative core of London and the centre of government: Whitehall, the Houses of Parliament (officially called the Palace of Westminster), St James's Palace (London home of the Prince of Wales), and Buckingham Palace (the London residence of Queen Elizabeth II). The West End also contains Hyde Park, London's largest open space, which leads west to the districts of Knightsbridge and Kensington, both fashionable residential areas with such attractions as Harrods department store, the Royal Albert Hall, and the South Kensington museums. South of the river, upstream from the Houses of Parliament, lies Lambeth Palace, home of the Archbishop of Canterbury; nearby is the South Bank Centre, the arts and theatre complex. Beyond lie other residential districts with historical associations, such as Dulwich, Clapham, Wimbledon (one of London's earliest settlements), and Greenwich (home of the Royal Naval College, the restored *Cutty Sark* tea clipper, and the Prime Meridian at the Old Royal Observatory).

Economy

Economic activity in London contributes almost one sixth of Britain's non-oil gross domestic product (GDP). In mid-1995 the total number of people employed in the capital was 3.1 million (compared with over 3.5 million in 1981). About 85 per cent of London's employment is now in service industries, notably in financial and business services which, at almost 750,000, may be the largest such concentration in any city in the world. Other service sectors supporting significant levels of employment include public administration (central and local government and other official agencies), retail and wholesale distribution, hotels and catering, education and health services, and transport and communications. Manufacturing makes up an important, though relatively small, part of the London economy.

The financial and business services sector makes up over a third of the capital's GDP. London is one of the three main global financial centres (with New York and Tokyo) and is noted for having a larger number of international banks than any other financial centre; a banking sector that accounts for about 20 per cent of total international bank lending; one of the largest international insurance markets; the largest centre in the world for trading overseas equities; the world's largest foreign exchange market; one of the world's biggest financial derivatives markets; the greatest concentration of international bond dealers; major markets for transactions in commodities; and a vast range of ancillary and support services (legal, accountancy, management, property, computer, and advertising consultancy). The Big Bang deregulation of financial markets in 1986 allowed changes in the structure of the industry that created conglomerates operating across all markets (although many specialists still exist). The insurance sector includes general insurance companies as well as life assurance companies and societies. It is less focused on London than is banking, but still generates a considerable share of financial and business services employment in the capital. Lloyd's of London, an incorporated society of private insurers (which has had some highly publicized financial problems in recent years), accounts for about half of the international insurance market that is based in London.

Tourism is another vital service sector within the London economy. London is one of the world's major tourist destinations and a leading conference venue, attracting over 23 million visitors annually. Of these, 13 million are from outside the United Kingdom. Tourist expenditure in London in 1994 reached £6.1 billion (US$9 billion), and overseas visitors accounted for 85 per cent of this spending. Over 200,000 people work in tourism-related industries within the capital. There are about 480 hotels in London, approximately a third of which are located in Westminster. Tourist attractions include the many museums, art galleries, monuments, historic buildings, gardens, churches, and shopping facilities. The most popular attractions are the British Museum (with over 6 million visitors in 1994-1995), the National Gallery, Westminster Abbey (where the sovereign is crowned), Madame Tussaud's waxworks, and the Tower of London.

Manufacturing remains a significant part of London's economy, accounting for some 13 per cent of output, but has been declining for many years. In general, heavy industry in London has been disappearing since the war, and between 1982 and 1994 the numbers employed in manufacturing almost halved to approximately 328,000 (about 10 per cent of total employment). Printing and publishing remains one of the most healthy industries and accounts for over a quarter of London's manufacturing employment. This reflects London's role as an administrative, financial, and media centre, placing heavy demands on printing. Other important manufacturing sectors include electrical and electronic engineering; food, drink, and tobacco; and chemicals and synthetic fibres. Generally, manufacturing industries are more concentrated in outer, rather than inner, London, and five outer London boroughs (Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, Ealing, Hounslow, and Waltham Forest) have about 20 per cent of their output in manufacturing.

Transport

Transport is essential to the operation of a city such as London. Its very development was significantly affected by the advent of the railways, and more recently the construction of roads

(particularly the orbital M25 motorway) has influenced patterns of settlement and economic activity. London has one of the most extensive urban railway systems in the world; in addition to the Underground railway, there is a network of suburban railways covering London and the surrounding region. Most of the passenger-carrying Underground lines in central London were built before 1914. Suburban extensions were added before and after World War II. The most recent line, the Jubilee, opened in 1979 and in the 1990s was extended eastward to Stratford. The Docklands Light Railway connects the City of London with Docklands and other east London destinations. Most travel is done by rail and Underground, although there is also considerable commuting by car, particularly in the outer boroughs. London has about 18,000 licensed taxis.

Railway services from London to Paris or Brussels through the Channel Tunnel run from the terminal at Waterloo station.

London has three main airports. Heathrow, about 25 km (15 mi) west of London, is the world's busiest airport for international passengers and is Britain's most important airport for passengers and air freight (handling about 55 million passengers and over 1 million tonnes of freight in 1996). Gatwick (south of London) is Britain's second-busiest airport in terms of passenger traffic, and Stansted (to the north-east, in Essex) is the sixth-busiest. London City Airport, based in the rejuvenated Docklands area, links Docklands and the City to continental Europe.

The Port of London, covering about 150 km (93 mi) of waterway along the Thames to the east coast, is the largest port in Britain in terms of total tonnage of cargo handled and in terms of non-fuel traffic. The total tonnage handled in 1995 was about 52 million tonnes.

Museums and Art Galleries

London's museums and art galleries contain some of the most comprehensive collections of objects of artistic, archaeological, scientific, historical, and general interest. The British Museum in Bloomsbury is one of the biggest and most famous museums in the world. Its collections range from Egyptian and Classical antiquities through Saxon treasures to more recent artefacts.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington is an assembly of fine and decorative art collections from all over the world. There are magnificent examples of porcelain, glass, sculpture, fabrics and costume, furniture, and musical instruments, all set in a building of Victorian grandeur. Nearby are the Museum of Natural History and the Science Museum. On the other side of London, in the City itself, is the Museum of London, which has exhibits dealing with the development of the capital from its origins to the present day.

The National Gallery in Trafalgar Square contains one of the finest mixed collections of paintings in the world. Next door is the National Portrait Gallery, whose collection includes more than 9,000 portraits. The Tate Gallery, situated on the Embankment between Chelsea and Westminster, houses the largest collection of British painting from the 16th century to the present day. In 1987 an extension opened to house the paintings bequeathed to the nation by J. M. W. Turner. There are plans to establish a new Tate Gallery of Modern Art in Southwark, near the reconstructed Shakespearean theatre, the Globe.

Other important collections in the capital include the Imperial War Museum, the National Army Museum, the Royal Air Force Museum, the National Maritime Museum, the Wallace Collection (of paintings, furniture, arms and armour, and objets d'art), Sir John Soane's Museum (founded by the architect of the Bank of England in the City), and the London Transport Museum. The Queen's Gallery in Buckingham Palace has exhibitions of pictures from the extensive royal collection. The Theatre Museum displays the history of the performing arts, while the Museum of the Moving Image traces the history of film and television.

The British Library, the national library of Britain, has a collection of more than 150 million separate items. Publishers must deposit in the Library a copy of everything they publish.

Performing Arts

London is one of the world's leading centres for theatre, and there are about 100 theatres in the capital. These include the three auditoriums of the Royal National Theatre in the South Bank

Centre; the two auditoriums in the London base of the Royal Shakespeare Company at the City's Barbican Centre; and the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square, home of the English Stage Company, which stages work by new playwrights. The largest concentration of commercial theatres is in the West End, around Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road, and the Strand.

In 1989 the partial remains of the Globe Theatre, where Shakespeare acted, and the Rose Theatre, where his plays were performed during his lifetime, were excavated on the south bank of the Thames in central London: a modern reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, near its original site, was unveiled in 1996.

The principal concert halls in central London are the Royal Festival Hall in the South Bank Centre (next to which are the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room, which accommodate smaller-scale performances), the Barbican Hall, the Royal Albert Hall in Kensington, the Wigmore Hall, (behind Oxford Street); and St John's Church in Smith Square, Westminster.

The leading symphony orchestras in London include the London Symphony, the London Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic, the Philharmonia, and the BBC Symphony. There are also several London chamber orchestras and choirs. The Royal Opera and the Royal Ballet, which rank among the world's finest companies, perform at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Seasons of opera in English are given by the English National Opera at the London Coliseum. English Festival Ballet (founded as London Festival Ballet) performs at the Royal Festival Hall, and the Rambert Dance Company provides regular seasons of modern dance in the capital.

There is a wide range of cinemas throughout London. The National Film Theatre on the South Bank, administered by the British Film Institute, annually mounts the London Film Festival.

Highly respected music, dance, and drama colleges in London include the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the Royal College of Music, the Royal Ballet School, and the London Contemporary Dance School.

Parks

Two thirds of London is intensively built up, yet the capital is well endowed with parks and open spaces. Hyde Park, adjoining Kensington Gardens, was formerly known as the "lung of London". Regent's Park, to the north of the West End, is surrounded by elegant buildings designed by John Nash for the Prince Regent (hence its name) and contains the Zoological Gardens (the London Zoo). Other important open spaces in London, some of them royal parks, include Green Park, St James's Park, Hampstead Heath, Holland Park, Battersea Park, Parliament Hill Fields, and Primrose Hill. In outer London there are some extended green areas such as Richmond Park, Bushey Park, Kew Gardens (incorporating the famous Royal Botanic Gardens), and Greenwich Park.

Education

London University was founded in 1837 and is the largest university in Britain, comprising many prominent colleges, institutes, and schools. These include the medical schools attached to London's teaching hospitals (such as the ancient foundations of Guy's, St Thomas's, and St Bartholomew's), and other renowned centres of educational excellence, including University College London; King's College; the Imperial College of Science, Technology, and Medicine; and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Other universities located in the capital include the City University, the University of East London, the University of Greenwich, Kingston University, London Guildhall University, Middlesex University, the University of North London, South Bank University, Thames Valley University, and the University of Westminster.

The Royal College of Art, next to the Royal Albert Hall, awards postgraduate degrees.

London is also the home of the British Academy, which promotes historical, philosophical, and philological studies; the Royal Academy (of fine arts); the Royal Academy of Engineering; and the Royal Society, devoted to the encouragement of the sciences.

The History of London

Site and Origins

When Julius Caesar overcame the native British forces in a skirmish by the Thames in 54 BC, he may possibly have left behind an encampment on the site of what became London; however, there is no firm evidence of the founding of the city until the Romans invaded again

during the reign of Claudius in AD 43. After another victorious battle, the invaders founded a settlement on the north bank of the Thames, at a point where it could conveniently be forded and bridged. This first “Londinium” did not last long: in AD 60 the Roman settlement was overrun and burnt to the ground by avenging Britons led by Queen Boudicca.

The Romans proved resolute, retook the city, rebuilt it, fortified it with walls, and thereafter for the next three centuries London flourished as one of the most important outposts of the Roman Empire north of the Alps. By around AD 200 the city had a population of about 30,000, and it could boast a fort, an extensive basilica, a forum, an amphitheatre, temples, and public baths for its citizens. Archaeological finds have demonstrated the opulence of the villas built by the leading citizens and the rich lifestyles they followed. London was the natural geographical site for the Romans to choose as the focus of their colony. Situated on Britain’s chief river, it formed a bridgehead, a hub for the military road system, and a superb port for trade with Gaul and the Low Countries.

Decline and Fall of Roman London

With the growing barbarian assaults on the empire at the end of the 4th century, Rome withdrew its troops and the Romanized population was left to fend for itself. Fierce raids by Picts, Angles, and Saxons led to the abandonment of the city and there is little evidence of urban activity during the 5th century. As the Anglo-Saxon settlement took root, however, London revived; by the 8th century trade was prospering again across the English Channel and the North Sea.

Medieval London

Viking raids in the 9th century affected all England. London was a prime target and for that reason strategically ever more important for the survival of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In consequence London replaced Winchester as the de facto capital of the southern kingdoms. Time and again in the 9th and 10th centuries the city was assailed, and chroniclers report savage attacks and heroic defences. Defence needs led to the emergence of aldermen—headmen of the precincts (or wards) of the city, who served as its military defenders. Here lie the roots of London’s later local government system.

Though the Viking threat was eventually seen off, the Anglo-Saxon monarchy could not repulse the Normans. After the defeat of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, quickly installed himself in London, had himself crowned on Christmas Day, and made it his headquarters, building the White Tower, a monumental stone keep that was to form the core of the Tower of London. The Normans restored the walls and rebuilt London Bridge in stone for the first time. William II, the Conqueror’s son, developed Westminster Hall 3km (2 mi) upriver from the Tower as his royal palace and a bolt-hole safe from fractious burghers.

Thereafter, the capital’s history was always in some measure a tale of two cities: the City of London itself, the square mile first circumscribed by the Roman walls, settled by the Saxons and Normans, and destined to become the centre of economic activity; and, on the other hand, the City of Westminster with its two focuses of Westminster Abbey and Westminster Hall, which became the home of the royal court and later of Parliament.

The Normans, and later the Plantagenets, made England strong, and London flourished as their capital and as a port and manufacturing centre. Much of England’s lucrative trade in wool and agricultural produce was floated down the Thames and exported via the wharves and jetties just downstream of London Bridge. Within the walls, skilled crafts flourished and, especially from the 14th century, these were organized into over 100 guilds, such as the Mercers, Salters, Fishmongers, and Vintners. A mixture of trade union and employers’ company, guilds were self-regulating bodies with the power to admit apprentices and appoint freemen (who thereby became citizens). Trades were localized and often associated with a particular street that still survives today: for example, Wood Street, Milk Street, Ironmonger Lane, and Poultry still branch off Cheapside (“cheap” is from the Anglo-Saxon for “market”).

London developed administrative institutions. From just before 1200 there is evidence of a mayor. This official seems to have had dual loyalties, being in part an officer of the Crown charged with carrying out royal business, while also serving as a focus for citizen loyalty—a tension indicative of the often strained relationships between the City and the Crown in the latter part of the Middle Ages. Many kings, notably the Edwards, treated the City of London as a milch cow, a handy source of taxes and revenues. Yet only a foolish monarch would risk

permanently alienating the loyalties of the merchant princes of the City of London, as Charles I was later to discover to his cost.
From the 15th century, London's government was conducted from the Guildhall, an impressive stone building that in part survives. Beneath the Mayor there was the Court of Aldermen, the Common Council, and the Common Hall. Tensions often arose among these bodies, and also between the assemblies and the guilds, but London managed to escape the internecine urban warfare so common in late medieval Italy. The emergence of Parliament conferred further importance on London, since its meetings were increasingly held in Westminster Hall.
London's prosperity was temporarily affected by the Black Death of 1348-1349, a bubonic plague epidemic that killed up to one third of the entire population. That did not, however, prove a long-term setback, and much evidence suggests that London enjoyed self-confident prosperity in the late Middle Ages. The guilds staged elaborate pageantry with their calendar festivities, and the *Canterbury Tales,* written by Geoffrey Chaucer around 1390, gives a vivid picture of pilgrims setting off to Canterbury from the Tabard Inn in Southwark, at the south end of London Bridge.
Tudor London
A great watershed in London's history was the Reformation instigated by Henry VIII, furthered by his son Edward VI, and completed by his daughter Elizabeth I. Unlike the experience of many European cities, in London the Reformation did not involve mass bloodshed. City fathers and educated preachers generally cooperated in bringing about a gradual shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. What proved more disruptive, however, and yet a golden opportunity, was the abolition of the monasteries and chantries. As a consequence of the Dissolution, much of the freehold property within the City and just beyond the walls changed hands. The Crown redistributed priories, nunneries, chantries, and charities into the hands of royal supporters who sold them off, turned them into spectacular houses for themselves, or redeveloped them for industrial and commercial or residential purposes. The result was a vigorous land market, and the unleashing of a property boom, with housing of all sorts for rich and poor alike becoming jammed into every nook and cranny of the old city and spilling over into the suburbs.
This building boom was both a cause and a consequence of the other great 16th-century change in the capital: rapid population growth. London boomed from a population of about 50,000 in 1500 to perhaps 140,000 in 1600, and to about 750,000 by 1700. Most of these people had flocked in from the country, but many migrants came from abroad, often as religious refugees, such as the Huguenots. These worked in London's burgeoning workshops and industries, notably weaving, laboured in the port, or found employment in domestic service.
London was becoming one of Europe's great commercial centres, its trade spreading to the Levant, to Russia, and after 1600 increasingly to North America. London was a beneficiary of the incessant warfare raging after 1550 on the Continent, especially the Wars of Religion. The destruction of Antwerp by the Spaniards in 1572 handed London supremacy as a North Sea commercial entrepôt.
England's monopoly trading companies, such as the Russia Company, set up by royal charter in 1555, and the East India Company (1600), had their headquarters in London. Its commercial dominance was epitomized by the career of Sir Thomas Gresham and his establishment of the Royal Exchange in 1566 as a commercial headquarters. Opened by Queen Elizabeth in 1570, the Exchange was the City's finest attempt at Renaissance architecture, a four-storeyed brick building (later stuccoed) built around a courtyard with covered arcades and dominated by a bell tower. Above the arcades were haberdashers, armourers, goldsmiths, drapers, and glass-sellers. It symbolized London's growing confidence as a world trading-centre.
London's glory was reflected in its cultural radiance. It became a major book-publishing centre, while the courts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I at Whitehall attracted painters, poets, and performers. London also became the focus for the study and practice of law, centred upon the Inns of Court: Lincoln's Inn, the Temple, the Inner Temple, Gray's Inn, and other lesser halls, situated between the City and Westminster. South of the river, Bankside flourished as a lively amusement precinct, boasting innumerable taverns and hostelries, cockpits, bull- and bear-baiting rings, and brothels. Theatres sprang up, notably the Globe (1598), where some of Shakespeare's plays where premiered. These theatres were closed by the Puritans in the

1640s as threats to public morals and order.
Many feared that spiralling population growth would unleash social disorder. Lurid pamphlets warned about the surge of criminals, pickpockets, and a disruptive low-life subculture. Yet in the event Tudor London seems to have been remarkably stable. Much was owed to the great resilience of its local government system. The city’s 100 parishes operated well as small, face-to-face neighbourhood communities; the rotation of elective offices absorbed a high proportion of the citizenry in running their own affairs. Guilds also continued to regulate trade and employment, integrating outsiders and giving some semblance of reality to the myth of Dick Whittington (the apprentice boy who rose to become lord mayor). London was fortunate in remaining essentially self-governing under its own mayor, rather than having a royal governor imposed, as with so many other European cities. Prosperity kept discontent down.

17th-Century London

London experienced several disasters in the 17th century. The first was political. Growing tensions between the early Stuart kings and Parliament provoked from 1641 a chain of events that led to the Civil War. After the City gave refuge in January 1642 to five Members of Parliament whom Charles I had tried to arrest, the bonds between Parliament and London became cemented. In August 1642 the king raised his standard in Nottingham. His flight from London left the way open for radicals to take over the city.
With war declared, Charles’s first priority was to capture the unruly city, which would have won the war at a stroke. His chance came early, before the parliamentary army was organized. On November 12, 1642, royalists overwhelmed the parliamentary troops at Brentford; to parry the inescapable attack, London gathered its trained bands in a force of 24,000 at Turnham Green, to the west by Chiswick Common; Charles hesitated, retired to Reading, and missed his golden chance of seizing the mutinous capital. London then threw up an impressive defence system, ringing the City with a vast system of ditches and fortifications. Thereafter, during the remaining four years of civil war, London remained securely in parliamentary hands, and the city’s wealth ensured ultimate parliamentary victory.
Further turmoil hit London soon after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. In 1665 plague broke out. There had been outbreaks of growing severity throughout the Tudor and Stuart eras, but the 1665 attack was particularly severe. Plague erupted early in the summer, especially in the overcrowded slum areas beyond the walls, peaking in September, when thousands were dying every week. All who could, fled, leaving it a ghost town. The diarist Samuel Pepys left moving accounts of the suffering in a decimated city. The cold winter weather finally put down the outbreak, but not before it had killed up to 80,000 Londoners.
Soon afterwards came the Fire of London. This broke out on the night of September 2, 1666 in a baker’s shop in Pudding Lane, just north of old Billingsgate Fish Market. Drought conditions and a strong easterly wind meant the flames spread rapidly, all the more so as the mayor was unwilling to take drastic action by pulling down houses in the path of the flames. The fire stretched westward for three days, eventually crossing the River Fleet by Blackfriars and moving into Holborn. About 60 per cent of the old city was destroyed, including old St Paul’s Cathedral, 87 parish churches, 44 Livery Company halls, 13,200 houses, Gresham’s Royal Exchange, and the Custom House. Surprisingly, very few lives were lost.
Sir Christopher Wren and other architects rapidly tendered majestic redevelopment designs but in the rush to get the city operational again all such plans were forgotten, and individual landowners and householders were encouraged to build more or less as they wished on their own sites. New building regulations, however, stipulated that post-fire buildings should be constructed of stone, brick, tile, and slate, rather than of wood and thatch as before. As a result, London escaped subsequent disastrous fires; the more salubrious urban environment perhaps also helped stamp out plague.

Restoration to Regency

With Charles II’s restoration and the post-fire rebuilding, London enjoyed a golden age. Commerce boomed thanks to the success of Britain as a European power and with the growth of empire. Around 1700, London’s quays were handling about 80 per cent of the country’s imports, 69 per cent of its exports, and 86 per cent of its re-exports, notably tobacco, sugar, silks, and spices. Everything came to London. Silk, tea, sugar, and tobacco warehouses lined the Pool of London; and commodity exchanges sprang up, such as the tea exchange near East

India House in Leadenhall Street. Contemporaries described the Thames as a forest of masts. Meanwhile, the City of London grew into a world financial centre, rivalled only by Amsterdam. The Bank of England was founded in 1694 at more or less the same time as the development of the Stock Exchange, brokers, and bankers.

Commercial prosperity produced a new urban geography. To the east of the old walled city, the port's activities attracted multitudes of working people who lived in slum conditions in Whitechapel, Wapping, Stepney, and Limehouse—sailors, watermen, and all those involved with the processing and distributive trades that grew up around the port. This area became the core of the classic East End, the haunt of Cockneys, especially after the construction of London's artificial docks early in the 19th century. Major riverside industries included shipbuilding (until the 1850s), breweries, and chemical firms; and, in the 19th century, gasworks, railway marshalling yards, and tanneries.

To the west of the old city the environs of Westminster attracted the elite. City bankers and merchants, now wishing to live away from their business, were beguiled by the idea of a smart domicile to the west, away from the smoke, dirt, and bustle of the city. Above all, landowners and gentlemen needing a town house were attracted to the West End, so as to be near Parliament and the royal court at St James's. The West End thus developed as a fashionable residential area between the Restoration and the Regency (1660-1820).

The first major speculative development had emerged in the 1630s, with Covent Garden, the property of the Earl of Bedford. This he developed as an elegant residential area focused upon a Piazza, built either on the Italian model, or in imitation of the Place des Vosges in Paris. Bloomsbury Square came next, developed by the Earl of Southampton, and soon afterwards St James's Square was built up in the 1670s by the Earl of St Albans as the most fashionable residential area of town.

Development followed development: Hanover Square, Cavendish Square, Berkeley Square, Grosvenor Square, Manchester Square, and Portman Square; and linking them were the stylish streets and shops of Piccadilly, Mayfair, and, slightly later, Marylebone.

The freeholds to these areas were typically owned by principal aristocratic landowners who would lease out plots of land to speculative builders who would be compelled to uphold high standards in their developments so as to sustain high rental values. A chief style involved squares and terraces of elegant brick-built dwellings in classical proportions with clean straight lines, tall sash windows, basements for services, and attics for servants—a mode of urban living that was economical on space yet extremely smart.

The West End also generated entertainment and pleasure centres—Hyde Park and other royal parks, theatres, clubs, spectacles, taverns, inns, shops, bagnios (genteel brothels)—a range of sights and places where the affluent could enjoy themselves, parade, and mingle in chic company. By the time John Nash developed Regent Street and Regent's Park for the Prince Regent, London was bigger than Paris and was proud of its reputation as the most lively city in the world.

19th-Century London

Georgian London had remained topographically compact, restricted by the limitations of contemporary transport. In the 19th century the metropolis grew rapidly in numbers because a series of major transportation innovations permitted geographical spread.

From 1829 the introduction of public horse-drawn omnibuses made it easy for city tradesmen and clerks to live in leafy suburbs such as Clapham, Chiswick, and Richmond. The invention of the railway then changed things radically. London's first railway termini, including Euston, were built in the 1830s, but it was not until the 1850s that a suburban commuter railway network began to emerge north and south of the Thames. Stations were built to get white-collar workers rapidly to their city offices. Villages rapidly turned into densely built-up suburbs, as speculative builders crammed villas and terraces into them.

Initially, the railways catered mainly for the middle classes, but from the 1860s Parliament stipulated that railway companies must run special cheap workmen's trains to ensure that the working classes could relocate from the old central slums to new and affordable housing being built up particularly to London's north-east and east around Tottenham, Poplar, and West Ham. The ability of the working classes to travel considerable distances to work was also enhanced from about 1860 by horse-drawn trams.

The greatest revolution lay in the underground railway, beginning in the 1860s with the Metropolitan Line between Paddington and Farringdon, and followed by the Circle and District lines. Initially these were shallow tunnels built on a “cut-and-cover system”, with carriages hauled by steam locomotives. It was only with the coming of efficient electric traction in the 1890s that a deep tube system became feasible—the Northern and Central lines were constructed first, and then, in the 20th century, the Piccadilly Line followed. Underground railways proved crucial in getting commuters and shoppers rapidly into the very heart of London without further contributing to the traffic jams that had become all too common.

London’s growth startled natives and visitors alike. In 1800 the capital’s population had been around a million. By 1881 it had soared to 41 million, by 1911 to over 7 million, and by 1940 to nearly 9 million. In 1800 10 per cent of England and Wales dwelt in the metropolis; by 1900, it was 20 per cent. London had become a “polypus … a vast irregular growth”, judged the pioneering 20th-century urban planner Patrick Geddes, “perhaps likest to the spreading of a great coral reef”.

Victorian London was a city of contrasts. The East End was poor, swollen by masses of immigrants, in particular Irish labourers and Jews from Eastern Europe. Whitechapel was the haunt of Jack the Ripper. The West End was rich and fashionable, with stylish department stores, theatres, music halls, and grand hotels that included the Savoy and later the Ritz. Such contrasts were depicted by a succession of authors and journalists, notably Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew, and slightly later, Virginia Woolf, and analysed by social scientists such as Charles Booth.

Yet this enormous growth brought immense problems. Health was endangered as London experienced worsening epidemics, notably of cholera, in the early-19th century as a result of festering slums, filth, and deteriorating sanitation. A series of major public health reformers, notably Edwin Chadwick in the 1840s and his successor Dr John Simon, battled to improve public health provisions. The crucial sanitary improvement was the modernization of sewage disposal, thanks to the vision of Sir Joseph Bazalgette. Completed in 1875, his drainage system connected every household to main drains that emptied into the Thames downriver on the ebb-tide, thus reducing the risk of contamination of the drinking-water supply, much of which was still taken from the higher reaches of the river. The scheme also involved building the Thames embankments. There was a growing recognition that London’s government had become an anachronism. Organized crime had grown in the 18th century and the French Revolution brought anxieties of massive public disorder in the metropolis. In the 19th century the capital was still being presided over by a City of London Corporation and a model of parochial administration barely changed since the Middle Ages. Dickens and other critics waxed indignant against parish-pump politics, claiming that the system was venal, blinkered, and inefficient. Yet vested interests dug in their heels; above all the Corporation was wealthy, well-connected, and resistant to reform.

Set up in 1855, the Metropolitan Board of Works was the first local government body for London as a whole, which possessed a quasi-democratic character. Set up for “the better management of the metropolis in respect of the sewerage and drainage and the paving, cleansing, lighting, and improvements thereof”, its functions included planning new roads (two of which were Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road) and the maintenance of London’s public health. It was not until the late 1880s that a genuinely democratically elected organization for London was set up. This, the London County Council (LCC), had responsibility for London’s schools, hospitals, roads, sanitation and transport system, though the City of London Corporation still retained its independence and the metropolitan police remained the responsibility of the Home Secretary.

The LCC had many achievements to its credit in the first half of the 20th century. Above all it initiated an energetic policy of public housing, decanting working-class Londoners from central slums to new estates built on the perimeter. It later promoted the building of subsidized flats in the inner suburbs too. It was also energetic in the preservation of London’s parks and open spaces, in the improvement of public education, and in the consolidation of London’s hospitals.

The 20th Century

After World War I, London continued to thrive and sprawl. Electric trams, the underground railway system, the building of new arterial roads, the motor bus, and eventually the rise of car

ownership led to the mushrooming of outer suburban dormitory areas 15 to 25 km (10 or 15 mi) from the centre. Some became employment centres in their own right. The Empire Exhibition of 1924 boosted Wembley, while air travel led to the construction of London Airport (later called Heathrow), which gave a lasting boost to the economy of west London. A new suburban culture highlighted the semi-detached house, built in huge numbers from the 1920s, affordable by the lower middle classes with the aid of cheap mortgages. It was not to everyone's taste. "The life of the suburb," declared Sir Walter Besant, one of London's most eminent historians, was life "without any society; no social gatherings or institutions; as dull a life as mankind ever tolerated."

So long as the British Empire remained powerful, London's economy boomed, overriding the disruptions of World War I. The City's finance-houses, merchant banks, and insurance companies had no equal, and the port handled immense quantities of trade from all over the world. London also remained a major manufacturing centre, particularly for high-quality goods, becoming an early home of the motor-car and electrical industries.

During World War II, the Blitz, from 1940 to 1941, resulted in massive damage, affecting up to a third of all London's housing. Casualties were substantial: about 20,000 Londoners died and another 25,000 were injured between September 1940 and May 1941 alone. Bombing continued throughout the war. Post-war London enjoyed a brief Indian summer, and in the 1960s the metropolis basked in a reputation as "swinging London", thanks to its associations with the world of pop, fashion, film, and youth culture. Yet danger signals were flashing. The ending of the empire and the decline in the significance of the Commonwealth undermined traditional imports and exports and, with freight containerization, London's docks closed and moved downriver to Tilbury. Many of the capital's traditional industries were collapsing or were beginning to move out of town, being threatened by strikes, high wages, rentals, and costs. From the 1970s there was a growing exodus of businesses and people out of London, moving instead into new towns (some deliberately planned to take London overspill) and green-field sites believed to offer pleasanter, cheaper, and safer environments. One consequence was that many inner-city and inner-suburban districts began to decline.

This growing sense of trouble, even crisis, coincided with the setting up in 1965 of a new governing authority to replace the LCC. The Greater London Council (GLC) represented a greater geographical area (*see* Greater London), an indication of the fact that London was continuing to spread. Hopes were high that the GLC would modernize and revitalize London. Its housing problems would be solved by high-rise flats, its traffic jams by a gigantic ring-road system of motorways, flyovers, and underpasses. All such proposals, however, proved deeply controversial and were thwarted. Plans to redevelop historical areas such as Covent Garden also ran into resolute opposition. The GLC itself became the centre of controversy, partly because of the flamboyant politics of its socialist leadership. This precipitated its abolition in 1986 by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, an act widely read as a party-political manoeuvre, irrelevant to the real needs and interests of London as such. Since then, London has been governed by a pot-pourri of agencies; it is the only major city in the West not to have its own elected assembly or mayor.

At the close of the 20th century, London's future remains somewhat enigmatic. As a great historical city it is a vast tourist attraction. The capital's old industrial base has, however, dramatically declined; unemployment remains high, and crime and poverty are escalating as in many Western cities. London's world position depends heavily upon the continuing success of its financial sector, but the uneasy relations between Britain and the European Union threaten to put that in doubt. Meanwhile, being an old city, the upkeep of its infrastructure is extremely expensive, and its transport system is out of date. Many believe that the emergence of impoverished, run-down inner-city areas, the growing contrast between rich and poor, and the absence of a proper democratic government for the metropolis bode ill for the future. On the other hand, London has always been multifaceted, with many distinct growth points, and a mixture of strengths enables it to respond positively to economic challenges.

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