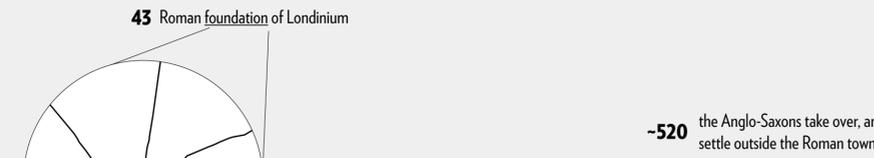
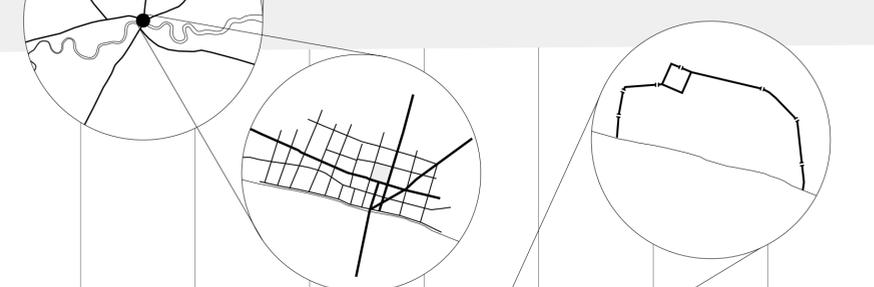


POLITICS



410 Londinium is abandoned following Roman decline

-520 the Anglo-Saxons take over, and settle outside the Roman town



55 first bridge on the Thames

-200 building of the town Wall

604 foundation of St. Paul's

ARCHITECTURE

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

After arriving in Britain, the Romans settled in a strategic point, where the Thames was easier to cross and the main roads through England met. The wall, aside from providing protection to the city, set a limit to urban growth, thus preserving its walkable scale up to the present day. These first urban choices proved to be of utmost importance for successful business in the centuries to come.

MONOPOLY

The City of London developed many unique privileges under the Anglo-Saxon reign, a political autonomy which was then officially recognised by the new Norman King. This independence meant that the City had direct control over its commerce, and, for this reason, it has been fiercely defended over the centuries.

PRIVATE GOVERNMENT

The Corporation of London—which has existed since time immemorial—came to be the governing authority on the City, owing to its autonomy. Having survived until today, with no major changes in its structure nor in the ceremonial, it is the oldest administrative body in England.

THE TWO CITIES OF LONDON

The decision of settling the Royal Court in Westminster gave the start to the growth of London as two separate cities: one as the centre of political and religious power, while the other as the economical hub. The trade guilds (called Livery Companies) controlled the City business with strongly protectionist policies, and became soon very rich and powerful. Today there exist 108 Livery Companies, most of which date back to the Middle Ages. They are responsible for electing the Lord Mayor.

BURNING IT DOWN

The Great Fire, started in a bakery, destroyed most of the City, as buildings were mainly made with wood and straw. The land ownership system in England had since long developed so that few people own most of the land, with the Corporation and the Livery Companies controlling vast parts of the City of London. Big reconstruction plans, including the French-inspired one proposed by Christopher Wren, were then rejected in order to avoid redistribution of the land, and the medieval layout has been maintained.

THE PLACE FOR BUSINESS

The City was dense and unhealthy, and increasingly perceived as chaotic and labyrinthic in comparison with the free land estates in the West of London (which is also upstream and upwind). It is then evident why, after the Fire, the aristocracy started moving westwards, closer to the Westminster. In 1700, coffee houses acquired a central role as the preferred place to make business. It is here that many modern activities were born, such as Lloyds and the stock exchange.

AUREA MEDIOCRITAS

In the absence of an upper class to direct the taste, the City was hardly affected by architectural trends and, except for Wren, no famous British architect of the time was involved in urban changes. Thus the architecture was sober, but generally unremarkable. The Corporation has always acted as a minimal state, by leaving large space to private initiative and not being involved in politics, as this would interfere with business. This has meant a permanent lack not only of an official public sphere (hardly any public building exists in the City), but also the absence of visions and large-scale plans.

SPECIALISATION

After 1800 the City turned into the commercial enclave driving the growth of London during the Victorian era. By the end of the century, most of the residents had fled, either to the fashionable West End, or the cheaper East End (land value in the City was already the highest in London). Most of the City was rebuilt in this period to accommodate more office space, and railways marked the birth of commuting. The numerous reforms to local governance approved in this period never spoiled the City's status.

MORE DESTRUCTION

After the Blitz London was severely damaged, however (once again) reconstruction plans largely ignored the City and the Corporation was left to itself. Modernist architecture had always been fiercely rejected by the Corporation, but, in an almost socialist parenthesis, the Golden Lane and Barbican estates were built in order to have some inhabitants return. A plan for implementing a city-wide network of elevated pedestrian walkways was eventually dismissed. As elsewhere in Europe, postwar reconstruction lacked quality and consideration for existing architecture.

INTERNATIONALISING

Finally, starting in the Seventies, planning limitations were overcome and the first towers were built, with a dramatic impact on the medieval fabric. Under Margaret Thatcher, financial market were deregulated and the City started to open to foreign investments after centuries of nationalistic self-reliance. The introduction of electronic trading drastically changed office typologies, leading to massive restorations and rebuilding.

GROUND CONTROL

In the wake of IRA bombings, a surveillance system all around the City was implemented. Albeit inspired by the "peace lines" in Belfast, it is a virtual "ring of steel" that controls vehicular access to the Square Mile. The system has been improved after 9/11 attacks. Parallel to this, public space of the City is undergoing a process of privatisation, as it is purchased and redeveloped by large companies.

REACHING THE SKY

Increasingly alarmed by international competition, the Corporation developed a new marketing and planning strategy centered on high quality, high-rise office space, improvements at the pedestrian scale, and luxury retail. The concentration of power and money in the City is such that no politician has succeeded in controlling it, adopting instead strategies of collaboration: the latest projects for new skyscrapers and rail connections have been actively supported by "Red" Ken Livingstone. As another residue of the past, United Kingdom features highly favourable tax avoidance possibilities for wealthy individuals and companies. This, combined to the lack of market regulation and weakness of financial authorities, has made London extremely attractive to large corporations worldwide.

1066 Norman invasion of England

1216 establishment of the Parliament of England

1067 William the Conqueror recognises the autonomy of the City of London from the monarchy

1376 the Common Council of the City is created

1500s the power of England is centralised: economy in the City of London, politics and religion in Westminster

1888 creation of the London County Council

1963 creation of the Greater London

-890 the Anglo-Saxons move inside the Wall for defence purposes

-1150 establishment of the Corporation of London

-1100 Westminster becomes the official seat of the King

1215 the King recognizes the Lord Mayor, directly elected by the City

ECONOMICS

1300s incorporation of the Livery Companies in the City government

1571 Royal Exchange

1688 beginning of insurance market in E. Lloyd's coffeehouse

1694 Bank of England

1665 the Great Plague

1666 the Great Fire

1350 the Black Death

1200s First covered markets

1050 building of Westminster abbey and royal palace

70 000

-950 new streets laid out based on the wall gates

1667 Rebuilding Act: imposes masonry construction and standardised typologies

1760-1800 demolition of the Wall and other improvements (new bridges, lightning, etc)

1850-1900 first office boom: most residential buildings are demolished

1670-1710 51 churches are (re)built all designed by Christopher Wren

1863 first underground railway line

1938 St. Paul's views preservation act

1976 completion of the Barbican Estate

2002 renewed spatial planning policies

2003 completion of 30 St. Mary's Axe

1960-70s debate on preservation of ancient architecture

1985-1995 second office boom: 50% of the office space is rebuilt

1988-2000 construction of Canary Wharf

1993 construction of the "Ring of Steel"

1993 Bishopsgate bombing by IRA

1986 the "Big Bang": deregulation of financial markets and introduction of electronic trading

2007 start of the financial crisis

2000 Ken Livingstone appointed Mayor of London

2009 Labour proposes (in vain) to introduce political control on the Corporation

THE CITY OF LONDON A BRIEF SPATIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY

Despite its evolution, the City has retained the physical and political form of a medieval town until today. While this, at a certain point, proved not appealing to residents, it turned out to be a perfect homeplace for capitalist economy.



0

200

400

600

800

1000

1100

1200

1300

1400

1500

1600

1700

1800

1900

1920

1940

1960

1980

2000

2020

200 000

140 000

75 000

35 000

20 000

50 000

-200 a.d.

0

population of the City