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The Great Fire of London that swept through the city in September of 1666 destroyed not only the physical infrastructure of myriad London buildings, but also many of the maps that reflected how London’s cartographers had envisioned their city. In an investigation of this event and the maps that predated and postdated it, Jacob Wasserman ’16 examines London’s rebuilding efforts and cartography to explain how one European city conceptualized its transition into a modern, urban place. As London physically rebuilt itself, so too did cartographers rebuild the image of the city’s future.
London’s map burned as easily as the city itself. Since 1606, booksellers had stored their products in Stationers’ Hall, a decrepit house behind Saint Paul’s Cathedral, and other nearby depositories. Within lay many of the collected works of England’s foremost travel writers and cartographers. These buildings, however, proved poor protection against the inferno that descended upon the city in early September 1666. On the 4th of September, flames reached Stationers’ Hall as “Lead [melted] downe the streetes in a streame… glowing with fiery rednesse.” Within the hall, the fire provided a real-time reflection of its exterior progress as it burned through maps and prints. Flames licked over the inked perspectives of shops and homes in a cartographic display of their own power. Over four days, the firestorm jumped from building to building and book to book, incinerating neighborhoods and pages alike. “The poore book-sellers have ben indeede ill-treated by Vulcan,” wrote the diarist John Evelyn, estimating the blaze to have destroyed over £200,000-worth of texts. Literally and figuratively, the map of London had been reduced to ashes.

A place may be best understood in how it is depicted and conceived by its residents. If so, London’s maps explain much about the larger forces at work in a city caught in a time of dramatic transformation. While not without nuance, the map of London changed rather dramatically after the Great Fire of 1666. Beforehand, London’s cartographers tended to create chorographic depictions—semi-pictorial plots replete with perspective drawings and human scenes. After the conflagration, many cartographers tentatively but demonstrably moved toward ichnography, a style in which the street plan is viewed fully from above, with buildings reduced to geometric blocks. To be sure, this change was neither linear nor normatively good—the post-fire map captured the city differently but not necessarily more effectively. Still, London had changed, and its new maps reflected that.

Figure 1: The so-called Agas Map, issued in 1633 but based heavily upon the 1550s Copperplate Map. Note how the wall confines almost every building within. The map recede into a landscape-painting-like horizon at its top, with mountains and sky rising from the fields. This is a later copy engraved by George Vertue, entitled “Civitas Londinum Ano. Dni. circiter MDLX” (1633; n.p.: n.p., 1737) and printed in Whitfield, London: A Life in Maps, 38-9.
However, the mere fact that the look of the maps transformed only tells part of the story. In the wake of the inferno, the use of cartography changed along with its style. Maps became tools for rebuilding in a manner simultaneously hurried, practical, and visionary. All in all, if the Great Fire altered the map of London, then the map of London, in turn, shaped how the city was rebuilt. A new London emerged from the fire, and much of the reasoning behind its new layout stemmed from the innovations and limitations of post-fire cartography and geographic knowledge. To understand how a traumatic event like the Great Fire could have such long-lasting repercussions, a look at the maps, plans, and depictions the fire produced is therefore necessary.

Many a book tells the story of the Great Fire of London and its aftermath, but few explore London’s self-conception through maps. T.F. Reddaway’s 1940 classic *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* provides a thorough overview of the legal and political dealings in the years of reconstruction, but touches on maps only briefly. More recent biographies, such as Adrian Tinniswood’s study of Christopher Wren and Michael Cooper’s work on Robert Hooke, explore how their subjects invented and pursued their own plans for rebuilding. Yet they discuss the possibilities and limitations of geographic knowledge only in terms of invention, ambition, and politics, with little connection to concrete effects or historical precedents. On the other hand, a number of authors have published histories of London’s map, including Peter Whitfield and Simon Foxell. Both of these authors note the change in London’s cartographic depiction before and after the fire. While their analyses offer insightful comparisons of visuals, each mentions the Great Fire only as an introduction to a centuries-long survey of maps. Putting these two historiographical methods in conversation brings the importance and effect of London’s maps into focus. As the whole of Europe began the process of modern urbanization, London’s fire-fueled, accelerated change offers a case study into this transition.

“THE ANCIENT ESTIMATION OF LONDON”

“The City the Fire destroyed,” wrote social historian Roy Porter, “had worn a medieval face.” London of the 1600s may have been a seat of power and center for trade, but its layout was slow to change. For instance, the antiquarian John Stow spent many chapters in his 1603 *Survey of London* detailing the abiding connections between London past and present—“proofe,” he claimed, “of the ancient estimation of London.” Despite Stow’s protests, though, the city had experienced at least some degree of change. Migrants flooded in from the countryside, almost
IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

tripling the population during the previous century. But the layout and structure of the walled city adapted poorly to this influx. Some suburbs developed, but many people simply became tenants in an increasingly crowded and outdated town. In one area just outside the walls, Stow described how “filthy Cottages” sat alongside roads that “…scarce remaineth a sufficient high way for the meeting of Carriages and droves of Cattell.”

As London strained, its political and social system also remained uneasily tethered to the past. After experimenting with a republican Commonwealth, England saw monarchy return with Charles II in 1660. However, the Restoration government soon faced unrest and unease, culminating with the Great Plague of 1665. Stow’s old London had failed to keep pace.

If London in the early 1600s physically retained its character of old, so did its maps. Before the fire, London was generally mapped from the so-called “prospect view.” In this alignment, the Thames runs horizontally near the bottom of the page, and the viewer looks at London from an oblique, raised view, as if sketched from the south from a high tower. Cartographers tended to draw buildings in perspective, with geometric accuracy traded for giving important edifices pride of place. Only surviving in fragments, the so-called Copperplate Map of the 1550s epitomizes this early style. Farmers, workmen, horses, and cows stand next to perspective houses and churches,

Figure 3: John Norden’s map of London in his historical travel book Spectulum Britanniae. The guild crests and inclusion of the walled city alone epitomize pre-fire mapping. Published as “London” (n.p.: n.p., 1593), I/21, Crace Collection and on an unnumbered page spread of Spectulum Britanniae, the First Parte…,” (London: Eliot’s Court, 1593).
capturing an idealized slice of life in the London of the era. Even as some modernizations began to encroach, London and its maps kept to the same course. The 1633 Agas Map, shown in figures 1 and 2, made few changes to the Copperplate Map, focusing on the walled city proper and depicting fertile countryside stretching out to the horizon beyond. Similarly, the author and cartographer John Norden published a major map of London in 1593. As seen in figure 3, his angle moves closer to vertical, but the city depicted remains thoroughly rooted in an earlier time, with what little development existed beyond the walls covered by guild crests. Norden drew the map for his travel account *Speculum Britanniae*, whose text describes the long history and mythology behind places like London, instead of contemporary development.\(^{11}\) Norden made maps as art and history, not for navigation or other practical uses.

Of course, both the city and its maps experienced change even before the Great Fire. The cartographer Richard Newcourt, for instance, created a gigantic, detailed plot of the city in 1658.
The last major map before the fire, Newcourt’s piece in figures 4 and 5 illustrates how London had begun to spill out of its walls into nascent suburbs, such as Westminster. The street plan is clearly shown, and buildings have become repeated units instead of individual sketches. Still, though, the map heavily distorts the city’s geometry and relies on the same type of perspective drawings as earlier maps. A few other maps had begun experimenting with ichnography, but they remained in the military or maritime realms. London itself would have to be reshaped before its maps could be.

More common than maps were panoramas and etchings, and no one was as prolific with these as Wenceslaus Hollar. An immigrant from Prague struck with wanderlust, Hollar bounced from patron to patron and city to city, all the while producing an incredible volume of engravings. Typical of Hollar and of the period overall, his panorama “London” from Bankside, in figure 6, could be classified in the same genre as Newcourt or Norden’s maps, were it not for its less elevated perspective. From panoramas to prints to book illustrations, Hollar’s vision defined the printed look of London right before the fire. Despite his huge output, though, Hollar had a still-larger project in mind. After viewing Newcourt’s map, Hollar resolved to construct his own, now known as his “Great Map,” using the best surveying techniques available. While he promised a potential donor that his depictions of buildings would “as much [resemble] the likeness of them as the Convenience of the roome will permitt,” he also boasted that his street plan would be “proportionably measured.” However, the plan proved too different from the prevailing style to attract support. Despite Hollar’s entreaties of donors, he never found the funds to complete the map before the Great Fire changed the city he wanted to represent.

Hollar desired a new London on paper, but others tried to make one in brick and mortar. A group of polymaths, surveyors, scientists, and otherwise well-to-do gentlemen established the Royal Society in 1660, and the first task many of them attempted was the reshaping of London. Reorganizing the city, members of the Society believed, would represent a similar endeavor to their scientific experiments. Among the foremost of them was the diarist and botanist John Evelyn. A compulsive organizer and eternal optimist, Evelyn saw the layout of his city as a serious ill in need of a cure. In 1662, Evelyn received appointment to a royal commission on “reforming the buildings, wayes, streetes, and incumbrances” of the city. He and his compatriots set to work right away, paving major thoroughfares and issuing directives on proper street-cleaning. But their
work proceeded piecemeal, while Evelyn dreamed of a change to the whole city. Through regime change and plague, Evelyn bided his time for a moment when London would finally become malleable.

“A RASA TABULA”

As much as Evelyn and his colleagues had dreamt, they never imagined their spark of invention would prove literal. In the early morning of Sunday, September 2, 1666, embers in the oven of Thomas Farriner’s bakery set fire to the wharves along the Thames. Despite the dry summer beforehand, the city administration reacted without much concern; Lord Mayor Thomas Bludworth, London’s chief official, infamously quipped that “a woman might piss it out.” As if in a Greek tragedy, hubris in the face of a mightier power became the city’s downfall. Whipped up by the wind and enabled by a lack of adequate firebreaks, the fire spread rapidly, engulfing the city for three more days. Forced onto a boat on the Thames, diarist Samuel Pepys watched the flames from nearly the same view as the creators of the city’s maps and prints. Instead of an idyllic medieval town, Pepys saw “one entire arch of fire from this to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill.” Only when the winds died down on Wednesday the 5th did the blaze subside, revealing the extent of the devastation. Evelyn’s diary entry from the 10th reads in full: “I went again to the ruines, for it was now no longer a Citty.” Indeed, while only eight people perished in the flames, London was left fundamentally changed. Over four-fifths of the walled city lay in ashes, with at least 13,000 houses and hundreds of shops, halls, and churches destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people wandered without shelter, displaced from their now charred homes.

Beyond the human cost, London’s former cityscape, upon which the city had long been mapped and conceived, lay ruined. The conflagration “obliterated at a stroke virtually every trace of a medieval city that had been six centuries in the making,” observed historian Neil Hanson. Whether tragedy or opportunity, the Great Fire burnt down one London and left open the possibility of creating another. Evelyn did not exaggerate in concluding, “London was, but is no more.” The next month would decide which London would emerge. Still staggering from the scale of the losses, King Charles and the city government acted swiftly but without a coherent plan. Five days after the fire, the Court of Common Council forbid property owners from immediate reconstruction. Charles himself then issued a proclamation on the matter three days later. On the surface, he promised an idealistic vision of “a much more beautiful city” that would become “…the most convenient and noble for the advancement of trade of any city in Europe.” He prohibited hasty and unplanned rebuilding, authorizing the removal of any unapproved construction. Nonetheless, Charles denied that “any particular person’s right and interest [would] be sacrificed to the public benefit or convenience.” As such, his grand ideas, like widening the main streets and building a city wharf, lacked any specific locational detail. Instead, he pledged a comprehensive survey of the destroyed properties before any plan was finalized and promised “a plot or model…for the
IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

Figure 7: Wenceslaus Hollar’s massively influential plot of London after the Great Fire. Shown here is his 1666 edition, completed with his own survey work before John Leake and others joined him for the 1667 and 1669 editions. Note the swath of blank space the fire carved out and the ichnographic plan of buildings and streets therein. Published as “A Map or Groundplott of the Citty of London with the Surburbes Therof: So Farr as the Lord Mayors’ Jurisdiction Doeth Extend, by which Is Exactly Demonstrated the Present Condition of It since the Last Sad Accident of Fire, the Blank Space Signifying the Burnt Part, & Where the Houses Be Those Places Yet Standing” (London: Brooke, 1666), P1003, II/53, Crace Collection.

whole building through those ruined places.” Regardless of the specifics, Charles recognized the necessity of cartography and surveys in order to realize his vision. Mapping would no longer be a years-long pursuit for travel guides and artists. Charles needed a map—a new kind of map—and he needed it fast.

The king’s plan required two elements: a detailed survey of land ownership and a map of which areas had been burnt down. For the latter, Charles turned to the man most experienced at depicting London: Wenceslaus Hollar. Within days, Hollar’s request to map the fire’s results received an enthusiastic response from a government desperate to use cartography to reshape the city. On September 10, Hollar and associate Francis Sandford were tasked “to take an exact plan and survey of the city, as it now stands after the calamity of the late fire.” They set to work immediately, surveying the damage and creating a map at an unprecedented speed. By November, Hollar’s map, shown in figure 7, began wide distribution. It offered Londoners a radically changed view of their radically changed city.

Hollar’s map shows a London hollowed to its very core—but ripe for transformation. The
drawing strikingly depicts the old city as an empty swath. “The blanke space,” as Hollar captioned it, lies raggedly demarcated from the unaffected outer districts beyond. Hollar included few buildings within the fire zone, all drawn as simple rectangles viewed from above, suggesting their ashen foundations. Streets and the blocks they surround receive little contrast, as if to say that they could be shifted around without any obstacle. Of course, Hollar may have been forced by approaching deadlines to leave out details and use blank space. But Hollar borrowed from his unfinished pre-fire map for much of the non-affected area—meaning he was not as rushed as it might seem. Moreover, he partnered with John Leake and other surveyors to engrave two updated versions of the map, in 1667 and 1669. Each included incredible specifics, like a listing of over 170 destroyed places of interest. Hollar and his fellows took the time to add this considerable extra detail, but they still left the stark, white spaces and geometric building renderings. To be sure, many elements, like perspective-drawn houses and guild crests, remained from earlier maps, but now were segregated from the ichnographic plan. The post-fire city, Hollar recognized, could not be mapped in the same way as the pre-fire city if it was to be rebuilt.

Hollar's maps influenced the thinking of the key players in the rebuilding of London. His work impressed King Charles, who named Hollar His Majesty’s Scenographer, a position affording some financial and anti-piracy protection. Hollar’s maps, though, were no mere trifle of the king. As historian Ralph Hyde relates, all the major committees and organs of rebuilding utilized Hollar’s plots. For instance, William Brouncker, first president of the Royal Society, showed Hollar’s map to an impressed Samuel Pepys only days after its release, as it was passed around the circles of court power both in England and abroad. Through Hollar’s work, these officials changed the way they viewed the city.

As John Evelyn wrote to Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Royal Society:

The want of a more exact plot, wherein I might have marked what the Fire had spared, and accommodated my designe to the remaining parts, made me take it as a *rasa tabula*, and to forme mine idea thereof accordingly: I have since lighted upon Mr. Hollar’s late Plan, which looking upon as the most accurate hitherto extant, has caus’d me something to alter what I had so crudely don.

While Evelyn may have already seen the city as a blank canvass for creativity, Hollar’s image allowed him to confirm and refine such ideas. Indeed, he later wrote that any plan for a restructured London should be mapped by someone of Hollar’s skill. Within a few years, the former London that Hollar drew aflame in a drawing accompanying the 1669 map had been replaced by a new, geometric city in the minds of those in power. Hollar’s map was “ruthlessly functional,” and the planners of the new London thereby conceived of the city as Hollar depicted it.
“I have seventeen Modells of the City of London of my own making,” Sir Positive jokes in Thomas Shadwell’s 1668 comedy *The Sullen Lovers*. Delivered by a know-it-all character, the line drew laughs for satirizing the multiplicity of grand rebuilding plans, some of which appeared even as the fire’s embers still flickered. “Every body brings in his idea,” remarked a somewhat sardonic Evelyn. Indeed, the blank slate presented by Hollar was a temptation for the planners and thinkers of London—a canvas upon which they hoped to create their masterpieces. Throughout the months and years following the Great Fire, the process of cartography reciprocally inspired and enabled these master visions—yet also proved to be their ultimate demise.

The fastest-made proposal came from the young architect Christopher Wren, later famous for rebuilding Saint Paul’s Cathedral. Wren’s plan called for a dramatic reshaping of London along the lines of Europe’s capitals. In his London, diagonal boulevards radiated from circular piazzas and divided the old city into commercial zones. Saint Paul’s Cathedral and the Royal Exchange served as focal points along carefully constructed sightlines and axes. While dramatic in its changes, Wren’s proposal was not entirely impractical—all the major buildings would stay in place and the topography of the city would not be disturbed. Still, as he attested in a document submitted with his plan, his ideas offered a stark choice: either London could become “the most convenient City for Trade in the World” or “…slide into Its old barbarity.”

His map, shown in figure 8, corroborates this viewpoint. Working before Hollar finished his map, Wren went farther by including almost no buildings at all. Monotone blocks, colored gray in later versions, replaced perspective drawings of old. Wren eliminated any sense of human-scale, drafting without reference to the size and needs of an individual, but rather the collective city. Wren’s was a city without man as its measure, a city whose blocked-out whole exceeded the sum of its manmade buildings. His son later described his father’s model as “very regular[,] with particular Beauty and Symmetry, suitable to so Noble a Situation.” Wren promised a world capital of finance and culture, but only by reducing the fabric of the city to gray blocks between avenues.

“Dr. Wren had got the start of me,” admitted John Evelyn. Presenting his plan to King Charles on September 13th, a mere eight days after the fire, Evelyn learned that Wren had bested him by two days. Wren’s hastiness caused Oldenburg of the Royal Society to complain that he should have waited for approval from the Society before his submission. But Evelyn remained upbeat, reporting to a friend that the king approved of the many similarities in both plans. Evelyn, who had long dreamed of reshaping London, now had his chance. Proper arrangement of streets and re-siting of buildings, he argued in a tract submitted to the king and later published, could restore London “not to its pristine, but to far greater beauty.” Evelyn echoed Wren’s dichotomy: London would end up “a very ugly city” without his plan but become a city that could “dispute… with all the cities of the World” with it.

Evelyn’s planned London may have shared the same land as the old one, but it would be a completely new city, the likes of which had never been seen—or
Even more so than Wren’s, Evelyn’s proposal both affected and was effected by cartography. In the early pages of his tract, Evelyn asserted that “an exact plot, according to the geometric scale of feet, ought in the first place to be taken.” And while Evelyn’s own original map is not available, engravers’ copies based upon it show the same modernizing and homogenizing tendencies present in Wren’s map. Moreover, though Evelyn was also initially rushed, he, unlike his fellow planner, edited and revised his map, deliberately choosing to keep his ichnographic style throughout. Over three versions, depicted in figures 9 and 10, Evelyn’s spatial thinking evolved in reaction to other maps. Evelyn expanded the area his plan covered after seeing Hollar’s map and added a “Y”-shaped intersection in front of Saint Paul’s, “as the most accurately ingenious Dr. Wren has designed it.” However, even with these changes, Evelyn’s vision remained as impractical as it was majestic. For instance, instead of adapting to the topography of the city like Wren, Evelyn proposed to use rubble to fill in valleys, as shown in his rather rigidly linear plots. Therefore, in his maps, Evelyn plotted the “more glorious Phoenix” he and the fellow elites of his idealistic age hoped to see arise.

Even so, neither Evelyn’s nor Wren’s maps proposed changes as drastic as those of some of the other plans. Scientist and surveyor Robert Hooke drew up a now-lost grid plot, which he circ-
Figure 9: The first two revisions of John Evelyn's plan. The top plot is his original, while the bottom shows that Hollar's map changed how Evelyn mapped and conceived of the city. Engraved by George Vertue based on the original. Published as “Londonum Redivivum” (London: Societat. Antiquar., 1748), XVII/8, Crace Collection.
cumspectly brought to the Royal Society, Lord Mayor, and aldermen for approval before submitting to the king. Meanwhile, Richard Newcourt drew up perhaps the most surprising map. Newcourt, who once used mostly medieval techniques to create the last major pre-fire map, now proposed a plot more radical than Wren’s, Evelyn’s, or Hooke’s. In his own words, “black pricks,…lines[,] and figures” had replaced intricate buildings drawn in perspective, as seen in figure 11. His maps now featured a pattern of identical, repeating module blocks, each centered upon a church. Only the faintly delineated Thames at the bottom places the plot in London as opposed to any other city. Thus, the fire transformed Newcourt from promulgator of visions of the old London to creator of radical ideas for the new. Finally, Captain Valentine Knight submitted perhaps the most extreme plan, calling for London to be paved over by twenty-four parallel roads in an almost perfect grid. No building would be given pride of place in his hyper-orderly city, shown in figure 12. Knight’s map, and especially his bold suggestion, according to The London Gazette, that “considerable advantages to His Majesty’s Revenue” would be gained “…if His Majesty would draw a benefit to himself from so publick a Calamity of his people,” incensed Londoners. With the populace on edge, the king promptly had Knight arrested for his cartographic presumptions. Mapping after the Great Fire therefore carried significant consequences and weight in the eyes of the public and the king.

Figure 10: The third revision of John Evelyn’s plan. In this version, Wren’s influence can be seen, particularly in the intersections around Saint Paul’s. Image from the British Museum.
“For six weeks,” wrote Tinniswood, “the future shape of London hung in the balance.” Accounts differ over which, if any, plan the king and court favored, but Parliament had the final say. According to MP John Milward, the House of Commons first considered “a model or models: many spoke for them but more spoke against them.” A third faction proposed a “midle way”: a widening of streets and strict building codes, but no comprehensive plan. In the end, the House could not agree and tabled the matter. Instead, as special Fire Courts held jurisdiction over immediate disputes, a commission of three royal appointees and three City representatives, including Wren and Hooke, was tasked with formulating a long-term plan. In order for them to operate effectively, though, the commissioners required a detailed survey of property lines and residence ownership—the second of the two geographic endeavors the king had originally desired, along with Hollar’s map. Without the survey, London would end up rebuilt almost exactly as it once was.

Geographic representations of London both enabled and destroyed any chance of radically restructuring London. Long after the fire, acolytes of Wren claimed that his plan was “unhappily defeated by faction.” The selfishness of individual landowners who rebuilt too quickly, they as-
asserted, obstructed the common good, and Charles’ still-weak place on the throne prevented the
government from interceding. While property rights and official impotence did play large roles,
this explanation misses the cartographic necessities of the rebuilding. A new London required
an accurate survey, and both the lack of general cooperation and the failures of the commission
doomed the survey’s chances of being completed. The commissioners did apply all their scientific
and political acumen to the task, ordering rubbish clean-ups and mandating property-owners re-
port their landholdings to booths set up in each ward. Hooke surveyed over 50,000 feet of streets
and property lines in only nine weeks. But the commissioners disagreed on the shape of the new
city, and as they debated how to widen streets or move buildings, the survey floundered. Landlords
and tenants bickered over responsibility for clean-up, others began rebuilding unsystematically,
and no one in power could entice or compel cooperation.  

Thus, when Parliament met again in January, needing to act rapidly, they chose the best
course they could in the absence of a survey. The Rebuilding Act of 1667 did change the structure
of the city, mandating wider avenues and instituting a strict building code with height limits and fireproofing requirements. In the end, the results of the survey were published and used to rebuild, but not soon enough. London therefore did not rise completely anew from its ashes, but neither did it retain its old form. Still, an “obstinate Averseness of [a] great Part of the Citizens” did not prevent the outcome Wren envisioned, as his son later claimed. Rather, the practical limitations of geographic representation left “the Surveyor…confin’d and cramp’d in his Designs.” As much as the fire had affected London’s maps, those maps in turn affected London’s rebuilding.

“A RECORD TO POSTERITY”

By August 1667, Wenceslaus Hollar had grown desperate. “My poverty…has urged me to unspeakable straites,” he confessed in a letter to Evelyn. Despite his royal appointment, Hollar had run up a £100 debt. Distressed yet determined, Hollar pressed on with the “Great Map” of London he had begun seven years earlier. Based upon the pre-fire city, it had now become obsolete

Figure 13 (on the essay cover, pg. 7): With the help of Hollar and Hooke, John Ogilby created an incredibly detailed wall map of London in 1677. The map is completely ichnographic and quite accurate in scale. Ogilby’s map shows how much both London itself and its conception among its depicters had changed. Published as “Large and Accurate Map of the City of London: Ichnographically Describing All the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, Courts, Yards, Churches, Halls, and Houses, etc. Actually Surveyed and Delineated” ([London], [Ogilby and Morgan], 1677), P1007, II/61, Crace Collection.

Figure 14: A comparison of the area around Saint Paul’s between Newcourt’s 1658 map, top, and Ogilby’s 1677 map, bottom. From Whitfield, London: A Life in Maps, 54.
as a navigational or planning aid. Changing strategies, Hollar decided his map would now serve a new purpose: preserving “a record to posterity” of a London otherwise lost. Changing strategies, Hollar decided his map would now serve a new purpose: preserving “a record to posterity” of a London otherwise lost. “My plan of the Citty as it was before the Burning thereof,” he argued to Evelyn, “[is one] which no man living upon the Face of the Earth is now able to performe besides my selfe.” Hollar solicited support from the king and men like Evelyn for his masterwork. Though he viewed part of Hollar’s draft in October 1666 and encouraged its development at the time, Charles declined to provide further support. Like many of the city’s elites, Charles had little desire to preserve the London of old, even in paper form. Hollar’s attempts to revive his old project threatened the possibility of transformation.

While the physical layout of the city may not have changed nearly as much as planners had hoped, the town and its map had still been fundamentally altered. True, London did not receive grand boulevards or rectilinear zones. However, it did end up with small pieces of these larger plans, such as Wren’s magnificent design for Saint Paul’s Cathedral. In parallel or even to a larger degree, the map of the city—and the general way it was conceived—also transformed, irrevocably if gradually. If these new maps are any evidence, the idea of “London” came to represent a more cosmopolitan city spanning a wider area. On the page, as in reality, London had broken out of its medieval walls.

John Ogilby capitalized on the ways London and its perception had changed. Before the fire, the dancer-turned-publisher had produced a range of books, including a Hollar-illustrated edition of Aesop’s Fables. The conflagration, however, left him with barely £5 to his name. But like Richard Newcourt, Ogilby’s style and products transformed as a result of the fire. Turning to cartography, the ever-enterprising Ogilby published England’s first road atlas in 1675, whose long strip maps used a 5,280-foot mile consistently for the first time. Finding that these new maps sold well, Ogilby recruited a team of eminent figures in the world of British cartography, including Hollar, Robert Hooke, and William Leybourne, to produce a master map of London after the rebuilding.

The map, shown in figures 13 (on the essay cover, pg. 7) and 14 and released in 1677, introduced a slew of innovations. Ogilby drew on Hollar’s knowledge from his unfinished pre-fire map and Hooke’s expertise in surveying science; the three met frequently throughout the production process. Going beyond Hollar’s 1666 map, the new plot was London’s first major map to include no perspective-drawn buildings, instead showing edifices drawn as solid, rectilinear shapes. Strikingly, Saint Paul’s, often the centerpiece of pre-fire perspective drawings, became a detailed floorplan, as if the viewer could see through the roof of the newly redone cathedral. Unlike the plans produced right after the fire, the map’s ichnographic style cannot be attributed to either hastiness or practicality, given its lengthy preparation and huge size for wall-hanging. Instead, a new London had been deliberately depicted in a new way. Buildings received different shadings depending on their use, a grid system allowed for easy indexing of hundreds of locations, and new survey and scaling technologies like the graphometer improved overall accuracy. While Ogilby died before the map’s final release, his step-grandson ensured it would sell widely by taking out weeks of
newspaper advertisements, issuing an explanatory pamphlet, and trumpeting Ogilby’s title as His Majesty’s Cartographer. In fact, “it remained the de facto source map of the city for another seventy years,” Foxell wrote. Overall, Ogilby’s map put to paper the scientific, rationalist spirit of the elites of the age, showing how they reconceived London even if it had not been rebuilt as desired.

If Ogilby’s map changed how the city was depicted, Hollar and others questioned what area was depicted. Since Elizabeth I’s reign, London authorities had struggled to contain the city’s sprawling growth. Despite decrees forbidding any building within a ring outside the city walls, construction continued. The fire proved the death knell of even a de jure prohibition on suburban growth: Charles was forced to allow construction outside the city for the many displaced citizens and businesses. Maps in the decades after the Great Fire visualized this trend. Produced concurrently with the Ogilby map, “A New Map of the Cities of London and Westminster and [the] Borough of Southwarke with Their Suburbs,” shown in figure 15, was independently published by Hollar in 1675. From its very title, the map demonstrates how the idea of “London” had started to include other urban areas like Westminster and Southwark, long shown only at the edge of pre-fire maps if at all. In this map, Hollar departs from the “prospect view” so common before—one that even Ogilby used—instead orienting the map true north and allowing the Thames to meander across it. Earlier maps depicted the walled city of London and incidental environs; Hollar showed the full metropolitan area of a world capital. And what Hollar engraved, others began to think: “Our Great Metropolis, London,” echoed Ogilvy and Morgan in 1677, included “in a large Sence, the Cities of London and Westminster, with the Borough of Southwark, and the whole mass of contiguous Buildings.” Of course, the era of serious suburbanization remained centuries away, but the foundations had been laid on the pages of Hollar’s map.

As the fire passed from emergency to memory, its legacy lived on in the map of London. For instance, Hollar included his Bankside panorama of London before the fire atop his 1675 map of London—a striking comparison in both style of representation and the city represented. But when not placed in contrast, the traits of post-fire maps were retroactively applied to the pre-fire city. Thus, while Hollar may never have published his “Great Map,” he did include a much less detailed retrospective inset of “London and Westminster before the fire” in a 1667 map of the British Isles. The fire represented such an important event that it merited prominent mention in a map of all of Great Britain, as seen in figure 16. Moreover, the inset uses limited perspective drawings and shows the zoomed-out view of the whole metropolitan area that Hollar pioneered. Hollar thus projected the London of the future onto the London of the past. In many a map in the decades to come, especially a huge, six-panel plot by Robert Morden and Philip Lea, this trend continued. In maps, as in reality, London—a city whose population topped half a million soon after the fire—had undergone many changes. So while Hollar may not have produced the “record to posterity” he once intended, the cartography used by him and his fellows did leave its mark on the actual and conceptual image of London.
“MADE, NOT BORN”

Many centuries later and an ocean away, Yale president A. Bartlett Giamatti asserted “cities are made, not born.” The point holds just as true for 1600s London. The city, the conscious congregation of humanity, is fundamentally a choice, an “artifact” of human creation. Thus, the rebuilding of London should not be viewed merely as a makeshift response to a god-sent catastrophe. The physical plan of London resulted from the improvements and limitations of geographic knowledge on the part of those who depicted it. In turn, that layout affected everything from social stratification to disease transmission. Many accounts of London’s rebuilding, though, assume that since a grand remodeling did not occur, the city fell back upon its default, if perhaps a slightly modified default. However, no matter how London was rebuilt, its rebuilding was still a choice, one both of those in power and of those living on individual parcels of land. More research must be done into the latter group to explore how geographic self-conceptions of the city among non-elites changed in response to the fire. But even if limited to those with the power to reshape the city, a history of London that treats the rebuilding as a failure does not succeed. True, Wren and Evelyn did not see their plans realized, but the city that did result was just as much an active choice. That choice could only be made based upon the information at hand, which, after the fire, was presented in a very different visual manner. To adapt Giamatti, London was remade, not reborn.

In 1677, builders completed the Monument to the Great Fire. A 202-foot-tall Doric column topped by a bronze urn spouting flame, the Monument allowed visitors to climb up and view London as Hollar and many other pre-fire cartographers once did. The city stretched out beneath the viewer at almost the same oblique angle as the choreographies of old once used. But while the viewpoint may have been the same, the city viewed had rather fundamentally changed. Around the monument in 1677 sat a city that had defied the very depiction the pillar supplied its climbers. Fittingly, the story of the monument offers a microcosm of the story of London as a whole: Wren and Hooke each submitted plans for the structure, but both ended up compromising as the city government chose a cheaper design. Even with its messy planning, the monument proudly declares on its inscription, “London rises again” – a message shared by many of the maps and mapmakers in the aftermath of the fire. Thus, as the monument allowed Londoners a new way of seeing their city, so too did London’s maps.

NOTES

1. All dates before 1750 in the text and in footnotes are referenced by the Julian calendar, in use in England at the time. However, for ease of understanding, dates have been converted to New Style (in which the new year begins January 1), as opposed to the Old Style then in practice (in which the new year began on March 25).


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Figure 15: Hollar’s 1675 map of the London area. Note how the map has departed from the old “prospect view”: it is now oriented true-north and shows Westminster and Southwark in full. Atop, Hollar added a panorama from before the fire for contrast. Published as “A New Map of the Cities of London and Westminster and [the] Borough of Southwarke with Their Suburbs, Shewing [the] Streets, Lanes, Allies, Courts, etc. with Other Remarks, as They Are Now Truthfully and Carefully Delineated” (London: Green, 1675), P1005, II/55, Crace Collection.
9. Ibid.

Figure 16: In this 1667 Hollar map of the British Isles, the legacy of the Great Fire is prominently featured. The inset at the top right shows London before the fire but uses the style of mapping common only after it. Beneath the insets on the right is a short text description of the start and course of the fire. Published as “A New and Exact Map of Great Britannie” (London: Overton, 1667), P648, II/57, Crace.
IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT


15. Evelyn, Diary, ed. de Beer, May 14, 1662, 437.


22. Ibid., September 7, 1666, 499; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 26, 47; and Porter, London: A Social History, 87-8.


24. Evelyn, Diary, ed. de Beer, September 2, 1666, 495 (emphasis original).


27. Ibid., 229.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 224-30.

30. Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles II, 1666-7 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1864), entry 19, 111.

31. Ibid., entry 110, 228; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 68; Pennington, Descriptive Catalogue, xli; and Turner, “Hollar’s Prospects and Maps,” 154.

32. Wenceslaus Hollar, “A Map or Groundplot of the City of London with the Suburbes Therof: So Farr as the Lord Mayors’ Jurisdiction Doeth Extend, by which Is Exactly Demonstrated the Present Condition of It since the Last Sad Accident of Fire, the Blank Space Signifying the Burnt Part, & Where the Houses Be Those Places Yet Standing,” map (London: Brooke, 1666), P1003, II/53, Crace Collection.


34. Calendar of State Papers, entry 110, 228 and entry 22, 256; Pennington, Descriptive Catalogue, xli; Ralph Hyde, The A to Z of Restoration London (The City of London 1676) (London: London Topographical Society, 1992), v; Pepys, Diary, November 22, 1666, 605-6; and Foxell, Mapping London, 28.

35. Evelyn to Oldenburg, December 22, 1666, 299-300.


38. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399.


41. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 398.


43. Christopher Wren, “Consequences of Rebuilding the City upon the Old Foundations,” [1666], in Jardine, *On a Grander Scale*, 263.


47. Ibid.; Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. de Beer, September 13, 1666, 500; Tinniswood, *His Invention So Fertile*, 150; and Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, September 18, 1666, in Hall and Hall, eds., *Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, vol. III, 231.


49. Ibid., 54.

50. Ibid., 30.

51. Ibid., 46.


53. Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399.


IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

Knight, “Proposals of a New Model for Rebuilding the City of London, with Houses, Streets and Wharfs, to Be Forthwith Set Out by His Majesty’s and the City Surveyors: With the Advantages That Will Accrue by the Building the Same Accordingly, Viz.,” map (London: n.p., 1666), XVII/11, Crace Collection.

58. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 154.


60. Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, October 2, 1666, in Hall and Hall, eds., Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg, vol. III, 238.

61. Milward, Diary, September 27, 1666, 9; Evelyn to Tuke, September 27, 1666, 399; Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 55-9, 62; 311-12; Jardine, On a Grander Scale, 255; Journals of the Common Council 46, f. 123, in Sydney Perks, The History of the Mansion House (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922), Google Books, 144; and Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 155-7.


63. Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 60, 63, 311-2; Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 157-8; “His Majesty Having Been Graciously Pleased...” London Gazette, September 20-4, 1666; Cooper, “A More Beautiful City,” 134; and Tinniswood, By Permission of Heaven, 230.


65. Stephen Wren, Parentalia; or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens; viz. Matthew Bishop of Ely, Christopher Dean of Windsor, etc. but Chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren, Late Surveyor-General of the Royal Buildings, President of the Royal Society, etc. Etc. (London: Osborn, 1750), 269.

66. Ibid.

67. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.


69. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.

70. Hollar to Evelyn, August 1667, 43.

71. Hollar biographer Gillian Tindall has found one payment from King Charles to Hollar in October 1668, but dismisses it: it was only £50 and was made without mention of Hollar’s map project. Regardless, Hollar never completed his pre-fire map (Tindall, Man Who Drew London, 225).

72. Calendar of State Papers, entry 110, 228, entry 105, 430, and entry 109, 431-2; Hollar to Evelyn, August 1667, 43-4; and Tindall, Man Who Drew London, 172.

73. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 158, 170-1.


75. John Ogilby [and William Morgan], “Large and Accurate Map of the City of London: Ichnographically Describing All the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, Courts, Yards, Churches, Halls, and Houses, etc. Actually Surveyed and Delineated,” map ([London], [Ogilby and Morgan], 1677), P1007, II/61, Crace

78. Ogilby and Morgan, London Survey’d [2].
80. Calendar of State Papers, entry 105, 430.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
85. Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile, 231-3 and Reddaway, Rebuilding of London, 244.

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