

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STUDY OF MEDIEVAL LONDON  
WALBROOK PROJECT  
REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1 JAN. - 31 DEC. 1984

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aim of the project is to study, principally from the records of property holding, the history of the Walbrook area of the city of London up to the Great Fire of 1666. Sources exist for compiling full histories of properties in the area from the mid thirteenth century onwards, and for mapping the changing pattern of their layout. There is also a good deal of twelfth-century material, and the descent of one site in the area can be traced from the time of William the Conqueror onwards.

1.2 The Walbrook study area comprises the parishes of St. Benet Sherehog, St. Mary Woolchurch, St. Mildred Poultry, and St. Stephen Walbrook (Fig. 1). It lies in the heart of the city, where the principal line of communication from west to east, represented by Cheapside and Cornhill, crosses the Walbrook stream. During the later Middle Ages the stream lay open to the north of Bucklersbury, but further south had been covered over. Despite its central location the area was not one of the most densely settled parts of London, although it was close to some of the busiest centres of commercial activity, most notably in Cheapside. The study of the Walbrook area thus promises to add considerably to the picture of the character and development of the medieval and early modern city derived from the study of a group of Cheapside parishes immediately west of the Walbrook area recently completed by the Social and Economic Study of Medieval London. Work is also in progress on the suburban parish of St. Botolph Aldgate, on which a separate report has been compiled.

1.3 Work so far has shown that it is possible to reconstruct the history of the Walbrook area in a manner exactly comparable to that for the Cheapside area. Significant contrasts and comparisons between the two areas are already becoming apparent and are discussed more fully below (Section 3). One contrast concerns the presence in the Walbrook area of a number of large properties associated with residents of high social standing. This probably reflects both the lesser pressure for commercial uses in the Walbrook area and the desire of these residents for establishments close to the main markets of the city. Several of these properties were described as wardrobes, and probably served as storehouses for the expensive textiles and other goods which could be bought in Cheapside. In general, those who lived and worked in the Walbrook area were not concerned with the processing and distribution of such high value products. A good many of them were involved in the poultry, fish, and meat trades, which with other trades in foodstuffs were conspicuously absent from the central marketing area. Skinners were another trade group characteristic of the Walbrook area, which perhaps afforded the space necessary for the processing of their raw material. It does not seem that the Walbrook itself, as a source of

water, was a significant influence on the trades practiced in this part of the city from at least as early as c. 1300 onwards. Rather, the stream served as a common sewer. Several of these trades may have gravitated to the area because the smells associated with them made them unsuited for more densely settled quarters, but the really noisesome trades such as tanning and dyeing, both using large quantities of water, were conspicuously absent. Several of the major medieval buildings in the area are described below (Section 4).

- 1.4 The research has been undertaken by David Crouch and John Stedman, under the supervision of Derek Keene. These three are the joint authors of this report. The project, funded by an anonymous donor, forms part of the work of the Social and Economic Study of Medieval London at the Institute of Historical Research. The Museum of London provides accommodation and other assistance.

## 2 MATERIAL COVERED SO FAR

- 2.1 The bulk of work completed this year has been concerned with the records of the Corporation of London. Deeds and wills enrolled in the court of Husting have provided the basic evidence for the topography of the area and for the histories of most of the properties there (cf. Fig. 2). Most of the other judicial, administrative, and financial records of the Corporation have been searched and valuable material extracted. The enrolled pleas in the Husting Pleas of Land (searched from roll 51 onwards) enabled a number of tenurial complexities to be unravelled. The rolls of common pleas in Husting were not searched. Both the Corporation and the Bridge owned substantial properties in the area which are well recorded, respectively, from the later sixteenth century and from the fourteenth century onwards (cf. below, 4.2, 4.5). From the surveys of the foundations laid out after the Great Fire and the records of the Fire Court it has been possible to reconstruct the topography of the area at the time of the Fire (Fig. 3).
- 2.2 Work has also been completed on the collections of deeds in the Public Record Office and is currently in progress on the records of the twenty six religious houses known to have held property in the sample area. It is hoped that the collection of data from archive sources will be completed in about May 1985, so that work can then begin on writing up the gazeteer of property histories for the four sample parishes which will be the basis for further analysis.
- 2.3 Most of the material dating from earlier than c. 1500 can be attributed to specific properties, the exact or approximate sites of which within the area can be identified. A good deal of the later material, however, cannot yet be attributed. This was also the experience with the Cheapside sample at a comparable stage of research, and it is anticipated that the picture for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will become much clearer as the archives of more of the institutions which owned property in the area are examined. For this reason conclusions on the long term trends in the demand for property and the density of settlement in the area would be premature, although some comparisons with the Cheapside area are already apparent (cf. 3.3, 3.4).

## 3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 3.1 Primary tasks were the reconstruction of the pattern of the principal blocks of property within the study area. Fig. 2 is a schematic plan of the relationships between the individual tenements and the principal topographical features of the four parishes, c. 1300. It is based on the framework provided by data created in the course of the rebuilding after the Great Fire, and the ward plans produced for the Corporation in the 1850s. Where the evidence so far uncovered has allowed, properties have been located precisely, but the exact positions and bounds of most are, for the time being conjectural. Fig. 2 shows principal property boundaries as they were laid out after the Fire, c. 1670, reconstructed from the accurate surveys made then. They reflect closely the situation as it was immediately before the Fire, but with a certain amount of contemporary 'tidying-up'. The eastern areas marked 'uncertain' were surveyed by Robert Hooke whose plans have not survived. The plan of these areas may be tentatively reconstructed from Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676 and the documentary records of the Fire Court.
- 3.2 Several contrasts are apparent both between the Walbrook sample and the Cheapside sample, and within the Walbrook area itself.
- 3.3 The first of these is the preponderance of very large tenements, such as the fitz Walter tenement (now Grocers' Hall), the Blunt tenement (now mostly under the Midland Bank building), Servat's Tower, and the Bucklersbury tenement (later called the Barge), which gave its name to the street in which it stood. There were a number of similar large properties fronting on to Cheapside in the early Middle Ages, but all these had been divided into smaller units well before the mid thirteenth century; moreover they were originally smaller than those on Walbrook. In the Walbrook area the two large tenements belonging to the Marshal and Tolosan families had been broken up by c. 1250, just as the Cheapside properties had been. The owners of the others seem to have divided up and sold off their street frontages: rents were owed to the Blunts from tenements fronting their mansio; three tenements to the west of the gateway of the Bucklersbury tenement paid rents to the Buckerel family and three houses to the east of it passed in ownership with the main message. Yet the greater part of the area of each of these properties remained in single ownership and occupation well into the fourteenth century.
- 3.4 In Cheapside sub-division of tenements and infilling behind the street frontages was a response to high demand for land. These processes had ceased by the time of the Black Death and the total housing stock was in decline by 1400. In the Walbrook area the development of the Blunt tenement was similar: houses had been constructed within its courtyard for renting out by 1326, although they remained under the same ownership for much longer. That of the Bucklersbury tenement and of Servat's Tower was different. Neither appears to have been broken up before the Black Death, but by the 1480s, when they were in ecclesiastical ownership, both contained a number of separate houses. Whether such large establishments became surplus to requirements, fell into decay, and could then only be let by being divided into smaller units; or whether some other process was in train is not clear. The one large tenement which did not disintegrate, the fitz Walter tenement, passed into the

hands of a corporate body (the Grocers' Company) which then occupied the land itself.

- 3.5 Gardens were also more common in the Walbrook area than in Cheapside. Some were part of the large properties. Both the Bucklersbury tenement and Grocers' Hall had large gardens which survived until the seventeenth century. Other gardens, however, were enjoyed by owners of much smaller properties, such as the tenement immediately to the south of the later site of St. Stephen's church, or that of Solomon le Cotiller in St. Mildred Poultry, who in 1304 complained of animals getting into his herb garden because his neighbour's walls were in disrepair.
- 3.6 These contrasts indicate that the demand for space was weaker in the Walbrook area than on Cheapside. This seems also to be apparent in the shops along Poultry, which on average seem to have been larger than on Cheapside. More important, the seld, so characteristic a feature of the Cheapside commercial scene, was almost completely absent from Poultry and its environs.
- 3.7 A similar contrast between more and less commercially vital areas is apparent within the study area. The two northern parishes were the sites of daily food markets. Throughout the period poultry was sold in the street by non-citizens, while citizen poulterers were obliged to keep shops. Meat and fish were also sold in the street before 1345, since the Stocks Market was at first too small to hold retailers of both at the same time. This very lively street life and Poultry's importance as a thoroughfare, encouraged the drink trade. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries more brewhouses and taverns were found around these markets than in the two more southerly parishes. One also gets the impression that shops were more predominant along the street frontages of St. Mildred and St. Mary than on Walbrook or St. Sithe's Lane. It is certainly true that among the deeds concerning the two northerly parishes shops more frequently appear as individual pieces of property, changing hands independently of domestic accommodation. Commercial property was more valuable there than in St. Benet's or St. Stephen's parishes, where shops were almost invariably treated as adjuncts of whole tenements.
- 3.8 It is impossible yet to be definite about the occupational structure of the four parishes. Nevertheless some hypotheses can be advanced. The largest single occupational group was certainly the skinners. They have been found throughout the period living in Walbrook and further north into St. Mary Woolchurch. Many appear as property owners, so the trade must have been relatively prosperous. Poultry was one of the three areas where poulterers were allowed to sell their goods. Many poulterers must have worked there, and probably lived there too, and they appear among the inhabitants of the parish of St. Mildred. Relatively few are recorded as property owners, however, which suggests that not many were well off. A small number of fishmongers are known to have lived near the Stocks, but no butchers. These two groups must mostly have lived elsewhere although retailing in the area. Finally, there may have been a concentration of pepperers, grocers, and spicers in St. Benet's in the late Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century this concentration appears to have spilled over into Bucklersbury.

## 4 SOME MAJOR BUILDINGS IN THE AREA

Apart from the four churches and one chapel in the study area, there was a number of buildings in public or institutional use. In every case it has been possible to locate these more accurately than has been done before and to add to the available body of information about them.

- 4.1 Grocers' Hall. The earliest known occupant of the site of the Hall was Benedict Crispin, a Jew, in 1246. The Friars of the Sack acquired it before their order was dissolved in 1274. By 1283 the site had come into the hands of Lord Robert fitz Walter, whose London headquarters of Baynard's Castle had recently been taken into the Black Friar's precinct. The fitz Walters retained possession into the fifteenth century. Between 1429 and 1432 the Grocers' Company acquired the site and erected its 'Great Hall' there.
- 4.2 Poultry Compter. One of the two sheriffs' courts with attached prison (or compter) was in the parish of St. Mildred. It has been possible to trace its establishment there to 1385 (it was not previously known to have been there before 1477). In 1385 a certain John Spence recovered the site after a law suit against Smithfield Priory; he soon afterwards rented it to the City. By 1393, Spence's tenement - previously called 'the Castle on the Hoop' - had been rebuilt as a courthouse and prison, reached by an alley way lined with small tenements. The City acquired the freehold by a legacy in 1477. The Compter continued on the site until 1815.
- 4.3 Scalding House. The Scalding House lay in the parish of St. Mildred to the north of Poultry, opposite what became in 1420 St. Mildred's cemetery. It existed by 1361 but is no longer recorded after 1500. Each of the City's meat-markets had a nearby scalding house. They provided what was presumably a valuable service for buyers and sellers of poultry and pig carcasses.
- 4.4 Earl of Gloucester's Wardrobe. This was a large tenement to the south of Woolchurch cemetery which in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was used as the earl of Gloucester's wardrobe (i.e. storehouse and residence) in the city. In the twelfth century and earlier, before it came into the earl's hands, this property, the site of the church, the cemetery, the site of the later Stocks Market and a large property on the east side of Woolchurch Lane seem to have formed a block of land in single ownership.
- 4.5 Stocks Market. The Stocks, one of the City's great medieval market halls, was erected in 1282 by Henry le Waleys, mayor of London. The income from it was devoted to the upkeep of London Bridge. There had been a market on the site since at least the late twelfth century, and there was some form of structure on the site by the early 1270s when the posts placed by Henry le Waleys were reported as an encroachment. In 1358 the building had a pillared lower floor with stalls, and four chambers on a floor above. It was rebuilt in stone in 1410 and 1411 with an enclosed hall below and two floors above containing rooms let out to single men. There was a leaded roof and a stair turret. This seems to have been the building destroyed in the Great Fire.
- 4.6 Servat's Tower. This was a large tenement fronting on to the north side of Bucklersbury. At the end of the fourteenth century its northern boundary lay only 18-20 feet south of the Poultry street

frontage, and the eastern boundary may have lain on the course of the Walbrook. In 1300 the boundary between the parishes of St. Mildred and St. Stephen must have run along this northern boundary since none of William Servat's tenement lay in the former parish. Later, probably during the fifteenth or early sixteenth century when the tenement had been sub-divided, the parish boundary moved southwards to its present position. In the mid thirteenth century the tenement was used as a wardrobe by John Maunsel, treasurer of York and chancellor and prebendary of St. Paul's. Subsequently it was occupied by the Society of the Riccardi, merchants from Lucca. By 1294 it was in the hands of William Servat, a wealthy Cahorsin merchant, who in 1305 obtained license to crenellate a tower there. It was his work which gave the tenement its name, first recorded in 1339. Servat's tower subsequently became a wardrobe for Edward II's queen, Isabella, and a royal exchange, before Edward III granted it to the Dean and Chapter of the College of St. Stephen, Westminster.