London's 'Golden Mile'
The Great Houses of the Strand
1550–1650

Essex House
Arundel House
Somerset House

Manolo Guerci

The Savoy
Burghley House
Bedford House
Worcester House

LONDON'S 'GOLDEN MILE'

THE GREAT HOUSES OF THE STRAND 1550–1650

Salisbury House
Durham House

York House

Northumberland House

NON SINE LABORE FAMA

THEORICA   EXPERENTIA

To my wife, Eleonora

Endpapers Details of John Norden, *Civitas Londini*, 1600. National Library of
Sweden

Frontispiece Canaletto, detail from *The City of London*, *c.*1750, seen from
the garden of Somerset House. Royal Collection Trust (see fig. 74)

Image on p. v Daniel Mytens, *Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel*, ?1616, in the
sculpture gallery at Arundel House. National Portrait Gallery, London
(detail of fig. 42)

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J. M. W. Turner, *York House Water-Gate, Westminster, with York Buildings Waterworks*, 1794–5 (detail of fig. 198)

Acknowledgements

following pages William Morgan, *London and Westminster*, c.1682. By permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge ('London and Westminster', I, 2972, 38–39)

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Abbreviations

Preface

ORIGINATING FROM MY CAMBRIDGE doctorate, 'The Strand Palaces of the Early Seventeenth Century: Salisbury House and Northumberland House' (2007), which concentrated on two of the eleven great houses which once stood along the Strand, this book illustrates a crucial yet much neglected chapter of London's history. Neglected, no doubt, because none of these houses survived that frenzy of redevelopment that has long characterised the capital, of which the Strand as a strategic thoroughfare remains a poignant reminder. The site of Arundel House, for instance, has been recently redeveloped once more, while most if not all the buildings which replaced the Strand palaces from the late seventeenth century onwards have themselves been long superseded. If the Strand, and the centre of London in general, is made of many different layers from particular ages and fashions, its golden age falls within the hundred-odd years between the 1550s and the 1650s. This coincides with the apex of those magnates, old and new, who flourished during the Tudor and Jacobean era, arguably the most fascinating period of English history.

Since the beginning of this project, I have asked myself how to approach the subject, as a book on the whole of the Strand palaces was clearly a daunting task. Not only was it because this is a history of reconstruction based exclusively on records which are widely scattered, uneven in scale per case study and rarely of the most directly helpful kind such as plans and drawings. The main question, in fact, was whether to produce a house-by-house analysis or one which would cross-reference them through thematic discussions. The latter structure had a certain appeal as, after many years of collecting and processing documents on these houses, I was perhaps more inclined to draw conclusions than set the scene. This presented, however, a fundamental problem, for without setting that scene there could be no theme-based argument, while a book which

attempted both scopes seemed to me too ambitious and unmanageable: what I was confronted with was in fact the first step, from scratch, towards bringing the great Strand houses and their largely unwritten histories back to the fore of scholarly debate. I therefore conceived this book as a sort of compendium in which each house, arranged in topographical order from east to west, is chronologically analysed with its builders, inhabitants, contents and subsequent histories roughly within the timeframe just mentioned, and with short introductory sections on their origins and summaries of their subsequent histories, following traditional historical descriptions of London's architecture. The conclusion, however, highlights parallels according to themes, so as to instigate future discussion.

While every attempt has been made to reconsider each house afresh, the scale and scope of the chapters vary according to what could be found and the accessibility of the sources, not always straightforward when dealing with private archives.

1 Wenceslaus Hollar, bird's-eye
view of the 'West Central
District' (detail of fig. 8)
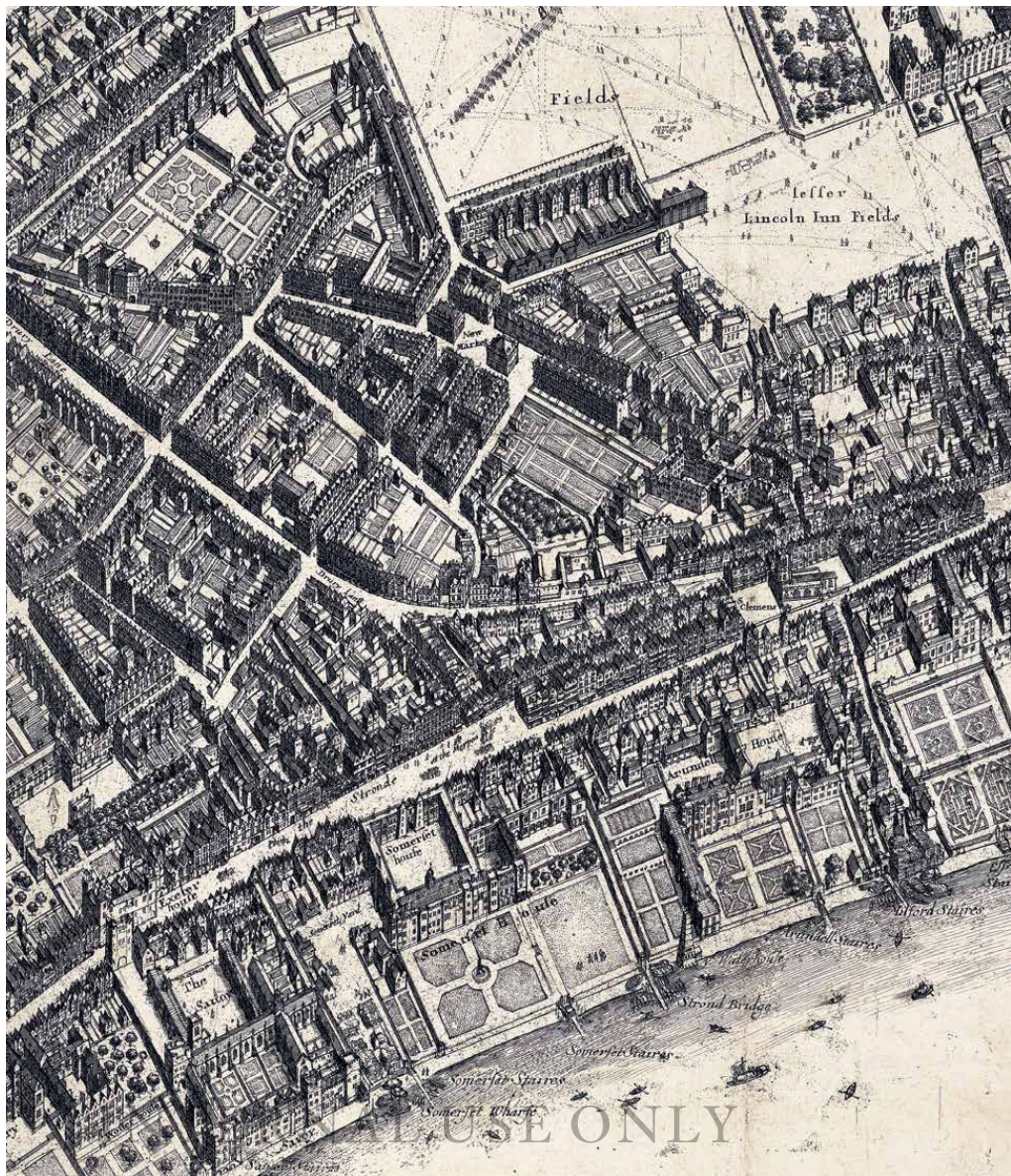
INTRODUCTION

IN BRITISH POPULAR CULTURE, THE TERM
'Golden Mile' refers to the stretch of amusement
arcades on the seafront at Blackpool, with the
Tower and its Ballroom, the rides and fortune
tellers, the phrenologists and oyster bars, or
indeed the many slot machines which may have
triggered the nickname.[1] In recent times it has
been more widely appropriated as a synonym
of bounty; indeed, *mutatis mutandis*, the term
perfectly captures the uniqueness of the Strand
in London, and the galaxy of power and prestige
broadcast to the Early Modern world via an
unprecedented level of architectural conspic-
uous consumption.[2] As this book will show, the
protagonists are the so-called 'Strand palaces',
eleven great houses built from the mid-sixteenth
century along the Strand, hence their name.
All but two faced the River Thames. Neither
'Strand' nor 'palace' has ever been part of their
individual names, which stem from their most
famous builders or occupants and, customarily
for this country (and, consequently, in the title of
this book), avoid anything grander than 'house'
for non-royal residences. Both words, however,
perfectly describe what we are dealing with. The
location identifies a historically crucial thorough-
fare, of which more shortly, while 'palace' refers
to the way these houses were perceived, given
the civic role they performed within a city which
had not quite seen the like before. For the Strand
palaces created a virtually uninterrupted line of
majestic riverside mansions, embodying the same
sense of prestige discussed in theoretical literature
on urban architecture from Alberti onwards and
rooted in the palazzi that beautified many great
cities on the Continent, not least because of their
function in international diplomacy. A 'palace', as
David Pearce explained in his *London's Mansions*
(1986),

> *is not just a big house, nor in this context a royal or*
> *Episcopal house, nor even necessarily the residence*
> *of an aristocrat – it is a house designed for ceremony,*
> *a house of parade, self-consciously formal. It is lifted*
> *above the ordinary by its scale, drama and, perhaps,*
> *beauty. Such a mansion is to be approached, entered*
> *and traversed in a pre-ordained sequence …*[3]

Developed to represent the state as de facto
substitutes for Whitehall by the Post-Reformation
political class, this palatial type grew out of the
necessity for their occupants to be in London
once a permanent court had been established at
Whitehall. The majority of the Strand palaces

1

differed from their European counterparts in a fundamental way: they lacked an urban appearance, for they hid from the street and instead opened towards the Thames, recreating a *rus in urbe* at a time of increasing development – one could think of a parallel with the Italian *villa suburbana*. They were, according to how one approached them, completely secluded. There could indeed be no greater contrast between the urban and the riverside, for the impression one got from the Strand, in spite of several rather imposing gatehouses, would give little or no idea of what a visitor would be confronted with once inside. The reason for this is that at least five of the nine Strand palaces overlooking the Thames could be approached from the river, often via ornate water gates which gave access to elaborate gardens, deep enough to allow the right sense of perspective and even grandeur to the approach itself. In these instances, the water front acted as the main entrance.[4] Accounting records are full of expenses for travelling along the Thames, while Pepys's diary offers many insights into the busy riverine environment. Described by Stow in 1598 as 'more than 60 miles in length, to the great commodity of Travellers, by which all kinde of merchandites are easily convaied to London, the principal Store-house, and staple of all commodities', the Thames was twice as wide as it is currently, and deep enough for the fleet to lie anchored close to buildings.[5] It was also well stocked with 'the fat and sweet salmon, daily taken in the streams, and that in such plenty as no river in Europe is able to excel it', as William Harrison reported in his *Description of England* of 1577.[6] It is therefore unsurprising that the river

should have acted as a magnet for prime residential property, be it episcopal, aristocratic, or indeed royal palaces.

Perhaps the first of the riverine typology relevant here was Greenwich Palace (fig. 2), a Crown property from the mid-fifteenth century conveniently close to Eltham Palace, the hunting lodge of Henry VIII.[7] As a staging post between Dover and London, Greenwich would have been the first mansion anyone would have seen. Equally, given its position on rising ground, and the bend of the Thames, views from it would have been far-reaching to both east and west. This is another trait observable in the Strand palaces, the rooftops of which (and towers, 'surveying houses' or, in one instance, a major portico by the river) would have commanded ample views. Greenwich was of course the most easterly of a series of royal palaces along the river, followed, in a westward direction, by Whitehall, Richmond and Hampton Court. In the middle of and facing this royal route, like the royal box of a theatre, the Strand itself extended from Temple Bar to Charing Cross, acting as the 'big channel of communication' between the City and the Inns of Court to the east and the Court and Parliament to the west, respectively the economic, judicial and political sancta of the kingdom (fig. 3). River and highway were therefore two sides of the same coin when it came to access, representation, significance and land value, hence to the establishment of the Strand as London's 'Golden Mile'.

The role of the Thames and the relative status of those sites which faced it and those which did not – we could speak of the nine riverside palaces versus the two on the north side of the

2 Anthonis van den Wyngaerde, view of Greenwich Palace from the river, 1558–62. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Strand – raise a number of points discussed in the following chapters. These include water gates (as opposed to gatehouses) and gardens, 'surveying houses' from which views of the river could be enjoyed, or indeed riverside promenades or roof walks, and how important these were for the design and appearance of each complex. The question as to whether the riverside palaces were more prestigious than those on the north side of the Strand is an interesting one, for, despite all the advantages described, what also mattered was the capacity for self-sufficiency provided by fields and orchards and the possibility they afforded for further expansion and speculation, an aspect which proved crucial in the subsequent history of the Strand palaces. Indeed, the large area of Covent Garden, thus named as originally the garden of the Convent of Westminster, is linked to the most important of the riverside palaces. It eventually formed the core, with Friars

Pyes and Long Acre, of what is still one of the largest private holdings in London, the Bedford Estates. Equally, prominent Strand magnates whose palaces were limited in size and capacity to expand strove to amass land in the area and attempted or managed to purchase or control more than one site. Besides, in the small pond of Tudor and Jacobean politics most of these patrons were related to one another in some way. Indeed, by the time the Strand had reached full capacity in the mid-seventeenth century, marriage was expressly being used to gain ownership of a palace there, as in the case of Northumberland House (see Chapter Eleven).

To go back to what we might describe as the dichotomy, perhaps quintessentially English, between 'outward' and 'inward', and to get an idea of the impact of those Strand palaces which did have a proper urban front, let us turn again to Harrison's 1577 *Description of England*:

3 Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, 'London' in *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 1572, derived from the lost 'Copperplate Map of London' of 1553–9. University Library, Heidelberg. Wikipedia, Public Domain

The Strand is shown on the bend of the Thames down river from Westminster.

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This also hath beene common in England, contrarie to the customes of all other nations, and yet to be seene (for example in most streets of London), that many of our greatest houses have outwardlie beene verie simple and plaine to sight, which inwardlie have beene able to receive a duke with his whole traine, and lodge them at their ease. Hereby moreover it is come to passe, that the front of our streets have not beene so uniforme and orderlie builded as those of forreine cities.[8]
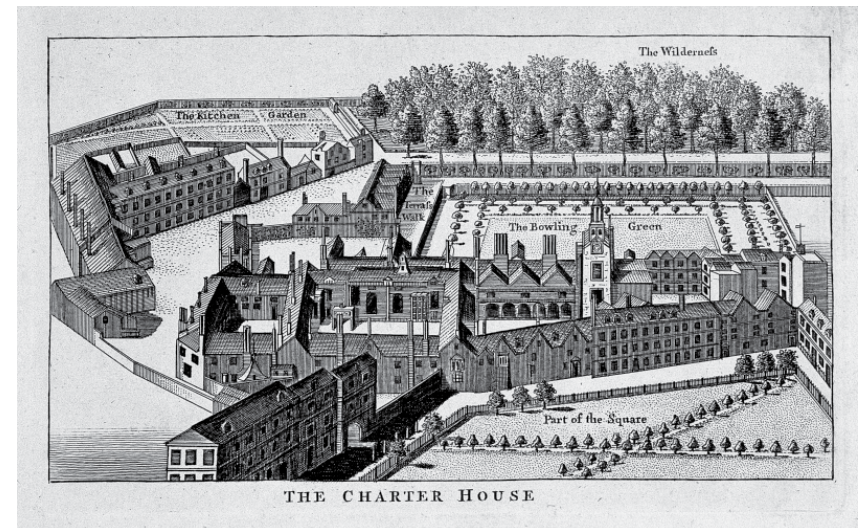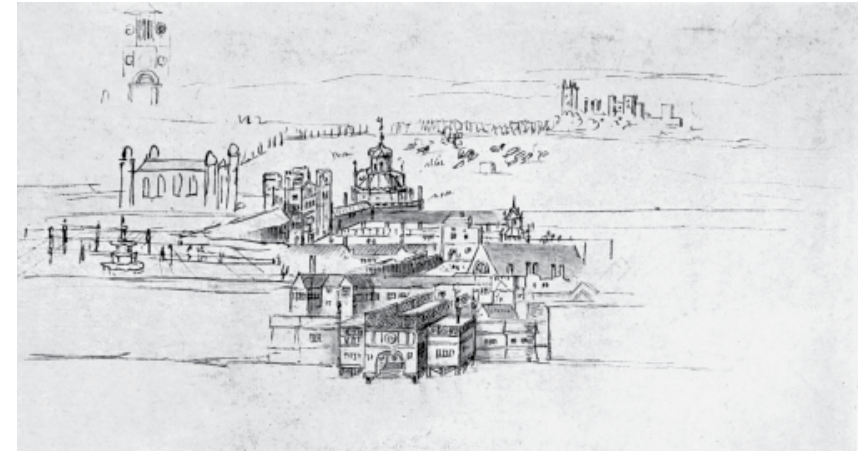
In the Strand, aspects of uniformity and order would be picked up by some of the most civic-minded patrons according to the Albertian recommendation that the planning of a house should be reflected in the decorum of the overall city. But the dichotomy between exterior and interior, as well as the differences between sites among the eleven palaces, are also a sign of where most of them came from. For they nearly all originated, to varying degrees, from the so-called Bishops' Inns, the power-houses of the high clergy built from the thirteenth century onwards, most of them outside the City itself in the open spaces along the Strand, a village which simply took its name from being located on the shore or 'strand' of the Thames.[9] As self-sustaining estates, the inns relied on the 'rents', tenements with shops at ground level along the street front, which customarily formed part of their precincts, thereby hiding the main house. Being too valuable to be disposed of, they determined the commercial viability of these properties, a factor in the eventual downfall of the Strand palaces. It is after the break with Rome, and the consequent Dissolution of the monasteries from 1536, that the inns were gradually taken over, remodelled or rebuilt by those who had risen to prominence under the Tudors and later the early Stuarts. This had famously included the confiscation of Cardinal Wolsey's own palace at Whitehall, where Henry VIII then based his court and where, one might say, it had all begun (fig. 4).

The climax of our story came between roughly the 1550s and 1650s, starting with the construction of Somerset House from 1547 and ending with the Civil Wars of 1642–51, by which time some of the great houses had begun to decline. It is a century which saw the entrenchment of conspicuous consumption in architecture as well as the notion of a permanent satellite court, whereby a number of these seats were either treated as extensions to Whitehall or became royal property. This does not mean that those

sites closest to Whitehall had a higher status (certainly in the first part of the period), for what mattered was size, whether existing buildings were habitable or could be repurposed, their status according to the bishopric they had represented and, as mentioned, access to and prominence from the river, alongside self-sufficiency and potential for development. Those properties physically closer to the Court did indeed rise in importance towards the second part of the period but this was more to do with the availability of plots than a real shift in the way these palaces were appreciated. As we shall see, it is Somerset House, about halfway along the Strand, that marked a seismic shift in terms of self-representation and the establishment of a secular palatial type. It is also the palace that became the main residence of queens, starting from Elizabeth I, thereby creating a royal outpost between the City and Whitehall, as well as adding another stop, as it were, on the riverine path which connected all royal palaces.

Prior to what one might call the Strand palace phenomenon, the need to spend more time in the capital in order to pass the Henrician legislative programme had already seen leading courtiers establish permanent and often grand seats in London. Some of these were in the City, such as Thomas Cromwell's at Austin Friars or Sir Edward North's at the Charterhouse, which not only still stands but also went from monastic to secular occupancy (fig. 5).[10] Indeed, after it had passed in 1565 to Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, this house was known as Howard House, where another Thomas Howard, 1st Earl of Suffolk, lived before inheriting his uncle's Northampton (later Northumberland) House in the Strand. And the Strand is where the first bishops' inns passed into the hands of other (perhaps higher) courtiers from the 1530s. In effect, it is the availability of these episcopal properties that not only allowed closer proximity to the Court but stepped up the game altogether. In parallel to the Dissolution of the religious houses, this edging out of bishops from their old seats, whether along the Strand or elsewhere in London, was used by the Henrician government to provide an expanded and radicalised court with new domestic outposts.[11]

While this secularisation established a type of grand house across London and the country, the Strand was top of the list for any ambitious courtier. Still relatively undeveloped in the early to mid-1500s, especially on the northern side, its great ecclesiastical estates provided much space for

4 Anthonis van den Wyngaerde, view of Whitehall Palace from the river, *c.*1544. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Wikipedia, Public Domain

5 Bird's-eye view of the Charterhouse, 1786. Wellcome Collection, London. Wikimedia Commons, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

lived as keepers of the Privy Seal. Among the Stuart favourites were George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, and Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke, who both earned a substantial piece of the Strand, the first ousting Francis Bacon from York House under James I, the second acquiring one of the most sizeable and historically important episcopal palaces, Durham House, under James's successor, Charles I. During Elizabeth's reign, the latter house had been the residence of Sir Walter Ralegh, a notorious casualty of the change from the last Tudor to the first Stuart. The seventeenth century brought other famous residents such as the Earl Collector Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, of Arundel House, and Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland, who turned Northampton House (or Suffolk House, renamed after another Thomas, James I's notorious Lord Treasurer) into the long-lasting London seat of the Percys. Alongside the Cecils at Burghley House on the north side of the Strand lived the Russells at Bedford House, who were later involved with the development of Covent Garden and are still in control of the Bedford Estates. Old and new, these resonant names, and four generations of queens at Somerset House, were coupled with royal embassies and visiting dignitaries from foreign courts, as well as with writers, poets, artists and architects such as Chaucer, Spenser, Hollar, Rubens, Orazio Gentileschi, Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, or Balthasar Gerbier, a mere illustrious few of the creative minds along the Strand. Altogether, patrons, artists and foreign dignitaries give us a sense of how much these grand houses represented what has been described as a 'multinational, polyglot constellation of potency and influence' and 'an unparalleled site for the privileged enjoyment of the hospitality and general largesse of the early modern elite'.[13]

All in all, the Strand palaces are a varied lot, as were their builders' and occupants' stances on architecture. Yet, while leading figures were sometimes highly instrumental in building at these sites, just as many simply lodged in them and we do not know what if anything they contributed. That said, never before or after this period was the Strand such a focus for experiment and display. Nor was its architecture ever again so influential, for its patrons also erected remarkable country seats with the same competitive drive, often employing the same architects and craftsmen. Apart from this town

development and houses on the river side would have been prominently situated. There ensued a war for the last plot between old and nouveaux courtiers and magnates, with bricks and mortar as the sharpest of weapons.

The protagonists cover the whole spectrum of the Tudor and Jacobean ruling elite, from those who emerged with Henry VIII, chief among them Edward Seymour, Lord Protector Somerset (fig. 6), who built Somerset House, to Elizabeth I's favourites, Leicester and Essex, closely associated with Essex House.[12] Then there were William and Robert Cecil, both Secretary of State under Elizabeth's long reign and 'rulers' of what has been described as the 'Regnum Cecilianum', who in turn erected Burghley House and Salisbury House. As Master of the Court of Wards and High Steward of Westminster, William not only controlled the patrimony of noblemen minor, quite a few of whom had possessions in the Strand, but also virtually the whole area, where he and Robert amassed major holdings. With another pillar of the Strand, Henry Howard, 1st Earl of Northampton (who went on to build Northampton House), Robert also secured the succession of James I (fig. 7). There were the Bacons, Sir Nicholas and Sir Francis, as well as Sir Thomas Egerton, the Baron Ellesmere of the famous household ordinances produced for York House, where all three had

7 Unknown artist, *The Somerset House Conference*, 1604. © National Portrait Gallery, London (665)

Robert Cecil and Henry Howard sit prominently to the right, at the head of the English delegation

and country mutual influence, discussed in the Conclusion, the Strand houses played a pivotal role in introducing new motifs and fashions in style, arrangement and display. Because of their relative accessibility, it was possible for anyone important to visit them, whereas country houses were remote and difficult to reach and there were no images in circulation.[14] It is indeed because of their influence that one might even suggest that the Strand palaces are key to the shaping of an English architectural identity.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the whole area around the Strand had been filled and transformed beyond recognition, with nine of the eleven great houses dominating the river or south side, while the other two on the north side impinged on Covent Garden, no longer the garden of the Convent of Westminster but a fully developed and fashionable part of London. This is chiefly illustrated by Wenceslaus Hollar's celebrated view of the so-called 'West Central District' (fig. 8), the only surviving impression
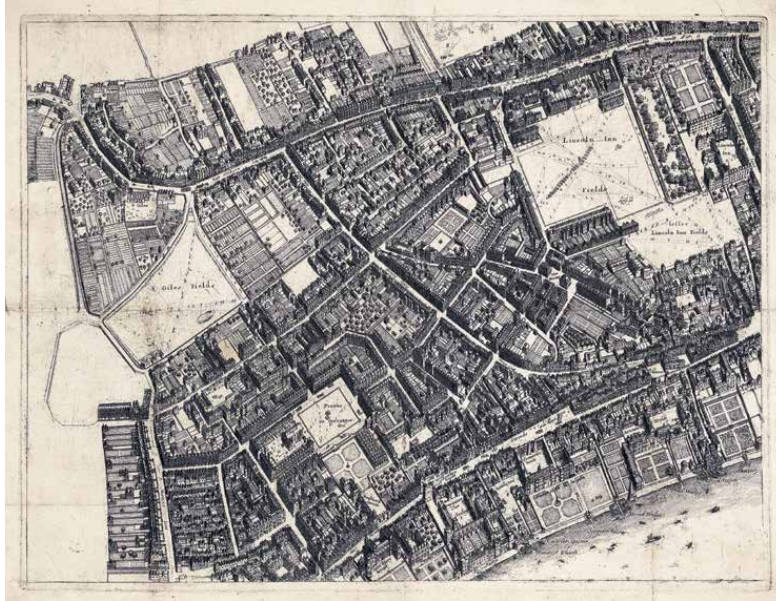
8 Wenceslaus Hollar, bird's-eye view of the 'West Central District', before 1666. Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International

9 Anthonis van den Wyngaerde, *Panorama of London from the River*, c.1544. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The Strand is to the left of Tower Bridge along the bend in the river.

of his Great Map of London prepared before the Great Fire of 1666. Precise and crucial to this study though it is, the view is not free from artistic licence.[15] The same is true for early topographical prints, beginning with Anthonis van den Wyngaerde's *Panorama of London from the River*, now dated to about 1544, which includes the earliest insights into the area and on the Strand more generally (fig. 9).[16]

A succession of diverse views provides key sources, to be interpreted in the light of detailed documentary evidence. They include *The Woodcut Map of London* of 1561–70, otherwise known as 'Agas' from a spurious attribution to the surveyor Ralph Agas (c.1540–1621), as well as Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg's 'London' in *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* of 1572, both derived from the lost 'Copperplate Map of London' of 1553–9, others by Hollar, John Norden's *Speculum Britanniae* of 1593, all the way down to John Ogilby and William Morgan's map of London of 1677.[17] The art of London's topography, rooted in the Northern European tradition of these artists, developed alongside the Strand palaces, so much so that Hollar is reputed to have drawn his views from surveys made from the top of Arundel House. Yet hardly ever do records easily match topographical evidence. One is therefore left with an intricate jigsaw of a great variety and number of documents, accounts and inventories in particular. Drawings and plans that are directly relevant to architectural reconstruction

are rare survivors. The reliability of this body of evidence, much of which is either presented here for the first time or re-examined afresh, is then in itself a challenge; equally, the absence of the buildings themselves has obviously worked against the near-archaeological reconstruction of both interiors and exteriors attempted in each chapter. While this makes for a contrast with my studies on the Italian and French contexts where buildings generally survive, the resulting picture is one in which each house fills a particular part of the overall story.

Working from east to west, the most easterly of these mansions, hence nearest to the City and adjacent to Gray's Inn, was Essex House. It was a compound, rather than a single structure, which maintained the medieval pattern of a courtyard entered through a gatehouse. Begun for the Bishop of Exeter in about 1324 and later granted to William Lord Paget, Secretary of State to Henry VIII, in 1569 it passed to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Elizabeth's chief favourite, who added to and improved it. In 1588 the house was inherited by Leicester's stepson, Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, who also gained a special place in the queen's heart. But in 1600 the house was besieged by the queen's forces, for Essex's adherents gathered there to confront queen and government. Essex House was at the centre of political as well as, perhaps in consequence of, private affairs: Elizabeth had travelled back and forth many times via the river