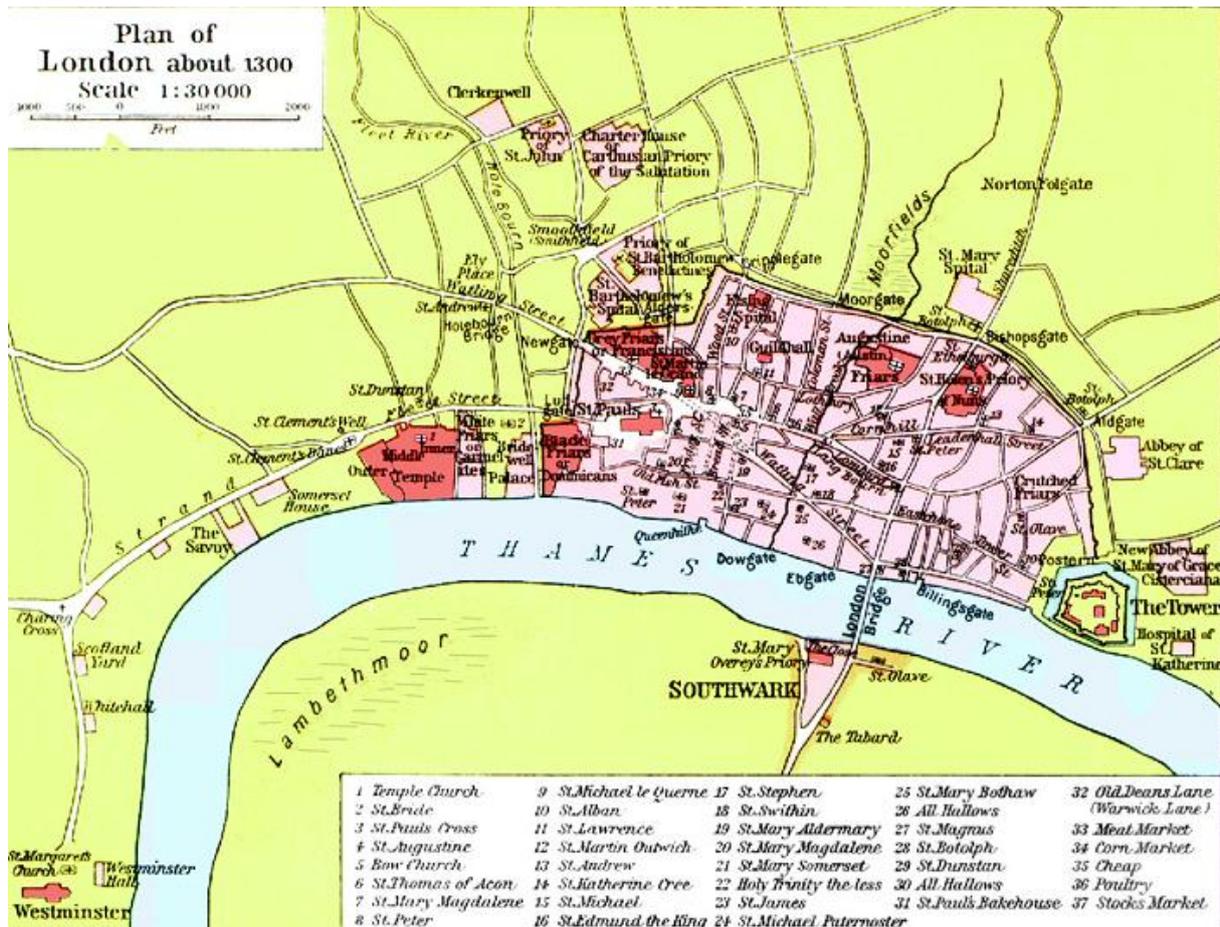


London in the Middle Ages



Birth and development of London as a city and a capital

In some ways the medieval history of London can be said to have begun on **Christmas Day, 1066**, when William the Conqueror was crowned king of England in a ceremony at the newly finished Westminster Abbey.

William, Duke of Normandy, killed English king Harold Godwinson in the Battle of Hastings. After the conquest of Hampshire and Kent, William and his army turned to London. Having realized that resistance was pointless, a delegation from London arrived to surrender the city, and recognize William as King.

At the beginning, William granted the citizens of London special privileges defined by the **charter for London in 1067**.

Monuments remaining from the medieval period

William built several royal forts along the riverfront to defend against seaborne attacks by Vikings and prevent rebellions. Among them, he built a castle in the southeast corner of the city that was expanded by later kings until it became the complex we now call **the Tower of London**.

The Tower acted as royal residence, and it was not until later that it became famous as a prison.

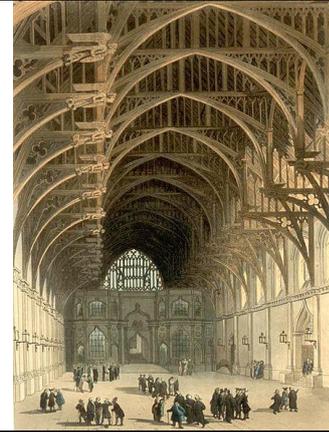
Wikipedia – B Gagnon



In 1097 William II (1087 – 1100) began the building of Westminster Hall, close by the abbey of the same name. The hall was to prove the basis of a new **Palace of Westminster**, the prime royal residence throughout the Middle Ages.

In the medieval period there were 13 monasteries in the city. **St. Paul's cathedral** was finished in 1280.

19th.c. depiction - wikipedia



In 1176 the first stone **London Bridge** was built, mere yards from the original Roman Bridge across the Thames. This bridge was to remain the only one in London until 1739. Because the passage across this one bridge was narrow and clogged with traffic, it was much quicker and easier for travelers to hire water boatmen to row them across the river, or transport them up or down river.

Government for the city and for England

In the early Middle Ages, England had no fixed capital per se; Kings moved from place to place taking their court with them. The closest thing to a capital was Winchester where the royal treasury and financial records were stored. This changed from about 1200 when these were moved to Westminster. From this point on, Royal government became increasingly centered upon Westminster, which steadily became the de facto capital.

On William's death his brother **Henry I** (1100 – 1135) needed the support of London merchants to maintain his dubious grip on the throne. In exchange, Henry gave city merchants the right to levy taxes and elect a sheriff.

In 1191 Richard I (Plantagenet) (1189 – 1199) acknowledged the right of London to **self-government**, and the following year saw the election of the first Mayor. The government of the city (Lord Mayor and council) was elected from the ranks of the merchant guilds. These guilds effectively ran the city and controlled commerce.

Economic and urban development

Trade and commerce grew steadily during the Middle Ages,

In London, trade was organized into various guilds, which effectively controlled the city, and elected the Lord Mayor of London.

Many of the streets in the city were named after the particular trade which practiced there : Thread-needle Street was the tailor's district, Bread Street had bakeries, and on Milk Street cows were kept for milking. There was also a very active livestock market at Smithfield.

London grew rapidly as a result. In 1100 London's population was little more than 15,000. By 1300 it had grown to roughly 80,000.

Medieval London was a **maze of twisting streets and lanes**. Most of the houses were half-timbered, or wattle and daub, whitewashed with lime. The threat of fire was constant, and laws were passed to make sure that all householders had fire-fighting equipment on hand. A 13th century law required new houses to use slate for roofing rather than the more risky straw, but this seems to have been ignored. Plague was a constant threat, particularly because sanitation was so rudimentary.

<http://www.britainexpress.com/London/medieval-london.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_London

<http://www.oldlondonmaps.com/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_monarchs

Questions

- When is London considered as the capital of England ? And what are the reasons ?
- Where is located the new palace in London?
- Which king decided to build it ?
- When and how did the government of the city get organized?
- Why can we say that Londoner's have practiced citizenship very early?
- What comparison could we make with La Rochelle at the same period?
- Except the political power, what was the other powerful group in the society? What kind of privileges did they get in 1100? mercy of whom?
- What comparison can you make about trade, transport and economy between London and Paris?
- How many people were living in London during this period? (*200 000 to 300 000 in Paris about 1328*)
- What would you say about the urbanism in London at this period?
- What were the main dangers? Why was it an unsanitary town?

Conclude : Explain in a short text, in what way these information's about London are comparative to those about Paris and relevant in medieval Western Europe towns.