

John Stowe's **Survey of London**

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William Andrews Clark Memorial Library

Early Modern Bibliophilia: A Celebration of the Chrzanowski Collection

November 15, 2019

The Clark Library owns the first edition of the *Survey of London* -- a book describing the places and people of England's largest metropolis. The Survey, written by John Stowe, was first published in 1598, and a second expanded edition was published in 1603.¹ This book is a quarto, bound in vellum boards. It was given to us with Paul Chrzanowski's first gift in 2009 and despite its modest appearance it is an important bridge between a number of books in the Chrzanowski collection, and a snapshot of Elizabethan London -- sometimes told in the first person.



John Salmon / St Andrew Undershaft, St Mary Axe, EC2 - Wall monument of John Stow / CC BY-SA 2.0

John Stowe was born in 1525. Both his father and grandfather were tallow-chandlers, or candle-makers, but Stowe apprenticed as a tailor. He spent thirty years in the Merchant Tailors Company and apparently his business was successful enough that it allowed him to collect books and manuscripts, by 1560 he was busy studying and collecting materials on English poetry, divinity, and astrology. His early writing reflected these interests. Stowe's first book was

¹ Stow is variously spelled either Stow or Stowe.

editing the *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, published in 1561, a copy of which is in the Chrzanowski collection at the Clark Library.

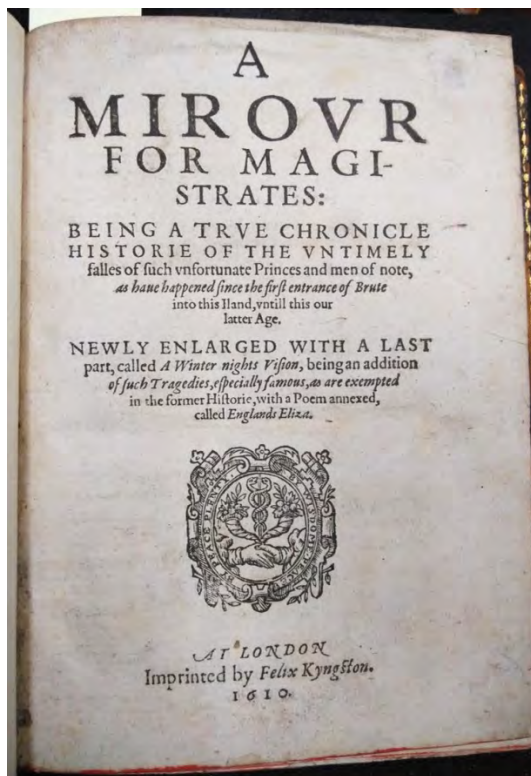


Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The workes of Geffray Chaucer*. London : By [Nicholas Hill for] Thomas Petit, 1550, <https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=6378224>

It was Robert Dudley, the future Earl of Leicester, who suggested Stowe take up history as a subject after Stowe gave him a transcribed copy of *The Tree of Commonwealth*, written by Robert's grandfather, Edmund Dudley, shortly after the publication of Chaucer's work.²

Around this time, a second edition of Richard Grafton's *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* was published and Stowe was commissioned to write up corrections to it. Stowe agreed to do this on the condition that he could collaborate with William Baldwin. Baldwin was the chief contributor to a book titled *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

² Kingsford, Charles Lethbridge. *A survey of London by John Stow, reprinted from the text of 1603 with an introduction and notes*. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1908, vol. I, p. ix, <https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=3253221>



A mirour for magistrates, being a true chronicle historie of the vntimely falles of such vnfortunate princes and men of note as haue happened since the first entrance of Brute into this iland, vntill this our latter age. Newly enlarged with a last part, called A winter nights vision, / being an addition of such tragedies especially famous, as are exempted in the former historie, with a poem annexed, called Englands Eliza.

London: Felix Kyngston, 1610,
<https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=8870354>



Grafton, Richard. *A chronicle at large and meere history of the affayres of Englande and kinges of the same, : deduced from the Creation of the vvorlde, vnto the first habitation of thys islande: and so by continuanee vnto the first yere of the reigne of our most deere and souereigne Lady Queene Elizabeth: collected out of sundry aucthors, whose names are expressed in the next page of this leafe.* London: Henry Denham, for Richarde Tottle and Humffrey Toye], 1569,
<https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=6378673>

This “collaborative collection of poems in which the ghosts of eminent statesmen recount their downfalls in first-person narratives ... as an example for magistrates and others in positions of power” is in the Chrzanowski collection, although we have a later 1610 edition. Unfortunately, Baldwin died before they could start, so Stowe ended up writing the corrections to Grafton’s *Abridgement* on his own. It was published as the *Summary of English Chronicles* and went through eleven editions during Stowe’s lifetime.

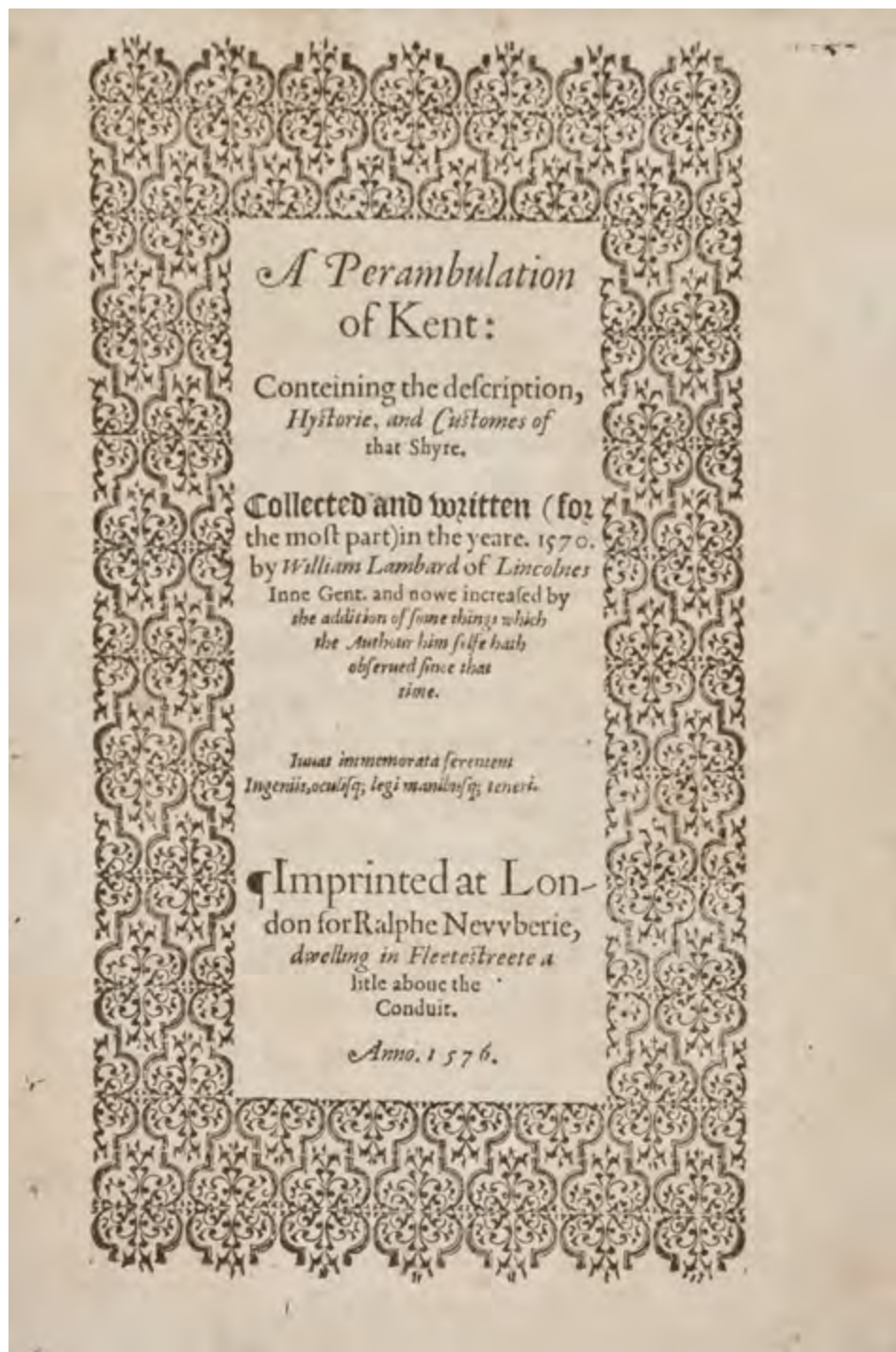
Grafton and Stowe became unfriendly rivals, particularly after Grafton published *A Chronicle at Large and mere history of the affairs of England*. Stowe accused Grafton of plagiarism and of using Stowe’s sources without actual consultation.

The precursor of the Society of Antiquaries, known as the College of Antiquaries, started meeting in 1586 with the intention to ‘construct a detailed and credible account of the origins and development of the English people.’³ John Stowe was an early member. He had many friends in the Society including William Lombard, the author of a *Perambulation of Kent* (of which the Clark has a copy in the Chrzanowski collection and which served as a model for Stowe’s *Survey of London*).

He was friendly with Henry Savile, John Dee, and Robert Bowyer. And, because of his collection of books, manuscripts, archives, and other documents, Stowe could provide source material to historians including Richard Hakluyt.⁴ By 1579 Stowe had left the Merchant Tailors Company to devote his time to study and writing. He wrote five books on English history which appeared in various editions during this life. Stowe died on the fifth of April, 1605 at the age of 80.

³ John Niles. “The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England, 1066-1901: Remembering, Forgetting, Deciphering and Renewing the Past (Chichester, 2015), 78” in *The Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proposals_for_an_English_Academy#cite_note-13, (accessed 04 December 2019)

⁴ Kingsford, p. xx.



Lambarde, William. *A perambulation of Kent: Containing the description, hystorie, and customes of that shyre. Collected and written (for the most part) in the yeare. 1570 by William Lambard of Lincolnes Inne, gent. ; and nowe increased by the addition of some things which the authour him selfe hath obserued since that time.*

London : For Ralphe Nevvberie, 1576,
<https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=6378677>

A SVRVAY OF LONDON.

Contayning the Originall, Antiquity,
Increase, Moderne estate, and description of that
Citie, written in the yeare 1598. by Iohn Stow
Citizen of London.

*Also an Apologie (or defence) against the
opinion of some men, concerning that Citie,
the greatnesse thereof.*

With an Appendix, containing in Latine,
Libellum de situ & nobilitate Londini: Written
by William Fitzstephen, in the raigne
of Henry the second.



Imprinted by Iohn Wolfe, Printer to the honorable Citie of
London: And are to be sold at his shop within the
Popes head Alley in Lombard Street. 1598.

Stow, John. *A survey of London. Contayning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that citie, written in the yeare 1598.* by Iohn Stow citizen of London. London: by [John Windet for] Iohn Wolfe, 1598, <https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=6493435>

The *Survey of London* is really two books in one: John Stowe's *Survey of London* and William Fitz-Stephen's *Description of the City of London* (which serves as the basis of Stowe's *Survey*). Fitz-Stephen's description was written in 1174 and served as a long preface to his own biography of his friend and patron, Thomas Becket, who was martyred in front of Fitz-Stephen four years beforehand.

Amongst the noble and famous cities of the world, this of London, the capital of the kingdom of England, is one of the most renowned, on account of its wealth, its extensive trade and commerce, its grandeur and magnificence. It is happy in the wholesomeness of its climate, in the profession of the Christian religion, the strength of its fortresses, the nature of its situation, the honour of its citizens, the chastity of its matrons, and even in the sports and pastimes there used, and the number of illustrious persons that inhabit it.⁵

And so begins Fitz-Stephen's description of the noblest City of London, which is one of the earliest descriptions of the city; the Domesday Book purportedly being the earliest.⁶ Now known to exist in five manuscript copies, Fitz-Stephen's *Description* was originally written under the title *Descriptio nobilissimae civitatis Londoniae* but was first published here in Stowe's 1598 *Survey*.

In John Scattergood's analysis of Fitz-Stephen's text, which he describes as "a city laudation", he argues that Fitz-Stephen's purpose in writing this *Description* is to place London in historical context with other European capitals.⁷ He suggests Fitz-Stephen's choice to include a long description of Becket's birthplace as belonging to the same tradition of Plato and Sallust adding geographical descriptions to their works on historical events. Fitz-Stephen's *ecomium urbis* explains the ideal city, and describes how London matches it.

⁵ Pegge, Samuel. *Fitz-Stephen's Description of the City of London, newly translated from the Latin original, with a necessary commentary. A dissertation on the author, ascertaining the exact year of the production, is prefixed, and to the whole is subjoined a correct edition of the original with the various readings, and some useful annotations by an Antiquary*. [London]: For B. White, 1772, p. 21 (D3r).

⁶ Gough (1768), p. 281 mentions this specifically, but modern sources are careful to point out that there is no contemporary survey of the city of London in the Domesday book. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/domesday-book/>. Earlier outlying areas that now make up modern London are described, and this might explain Gough's comment.

⁷ Scattergood, John. "Misrepresenting the city: genre, intertextuality and William FitzStephen's *Description of London* (c.1173)" in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages* (J. Boffey and P. King, eds.). London: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1995, p. 10.

Descriptio Nobilissimæ Ciuitatis Londoniæ.

De Situ eiusdem.



Nter nobiles vrbes orbis, quas fama celebrat, ciuitas *Londonia* regni Anglorum sedes vna est, quæ famam sui latius diffundit, opes & merces longius transmittit, caput altius extollit. Fœlix est aeris salubritate, Christiana religione, firmitate munitiorum, natura situs, honore ciuium, pudicitia matronali, ludis etiam quàm iucunda, & Nobilium sæcunda virorum : quæ singula semotim libet inspicere.

De Clementia Aeris.

Ibi siquidem emollit animos hominum clementia cœli, non vt sint in Venerem putres, sed ne feri sint, & bestiales, potiùs benigni & liberales.

De Religione.

Est ibi in ecclesia beati *Pauli* episcopalis sedes, quondã fuit Metropolitana, & adhuc futura creditur, si remeauerint ciues in Insulã: nisi fortè Beati *Thomæ* Martyris titulus Archiepiscopalis, & præsentia corporalis, dignitatẽ illam *Cantuarie* (vbi nunc est) conseruet perpetuam. Sed cum vtramq; vrbiũ harum Sanctus *Thomas* illustrauerit, *Londoniam* ortu, *Cantuariam* occasu : ipsius sancti intuitu, cum iustitiæ accessu, habet altera aduersus alterã, quod ampliùs alleget. Sunt etiã (quod ad Christianæ fidei cultum pertinet) tũ in *Londonia*, tũ in suburbano 13. maiiores ecclesiæ conuentuũ, præter minores parochianas. 126.

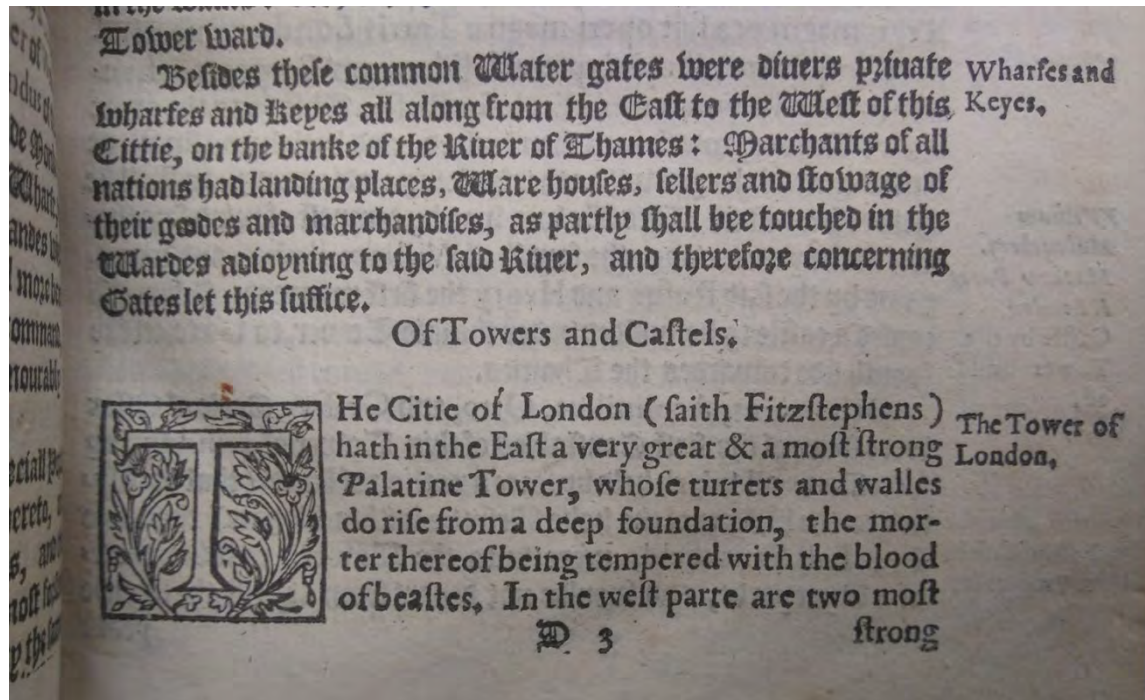
De Firmitate vrbis.

Haber ab Oriente arcem Palatinam, maximam & fortissimam, cuius & area, & muri à fundamento profundissimo exurgunt : cemento cum sanguine animalium temperato. Ab occidente duo castella munitissima : mu-

The Fitz-Stephen's *Description* is not long. In this copy it runs for nine-and-a-half pages, has been published in the original Latin, and put at the end as an appendix to Stowe's *Survey*. It includes the first reference to cock-fighting in England and the first description of ice-skating.⁸ The first 70 or so pages of Stowe's text follows this source material, translating Fitz-Stephen's Latin and then commenting on it or expanding it as Stowe thought necessary. In brief, Fitz-Stephen begins with the city's churches, describing St. Paul's, the 13 large churches in town and suburbs and 126 parochial churches. To the east is a "palatine" tower, clarified in the margins

⁸ Stowe, p. 480 (leaf H8V); pp. 481-482 (H9r & H9v)

of Stowe's *Survey* as being the Tower of London – Stowe then goes on to note that the “morter thereof being tempered with the blood of beastes.”⁹



Fitz-Stephen describes some of London's citizens and their occupations. The three principal churches – St. Paul's, St. Peter's, and St. Saviour in Southwark -- had schools which taught grammar, poetry, rhetoric and logic. Their students held debates and orations during festivals. Vendors and laborers were divided into geographical areas and hence street names and neighborhoods such as Corn-hill, Bread-Street, Poultry, and Cordwainer's-street.



Basher Eyre / Ward Notice Board / CC BY-SA 2.0

⁹ Stowe, p. 37 (leaf D3r)

Stowe includes Fitz-Stephen's description of the activities in Smithfield which involved horse racing, as well as livestock and farm equipment trading on Fridays—and notes that the market at Smithfield is still active despite the four hundred years separating the two authors.¹⁰

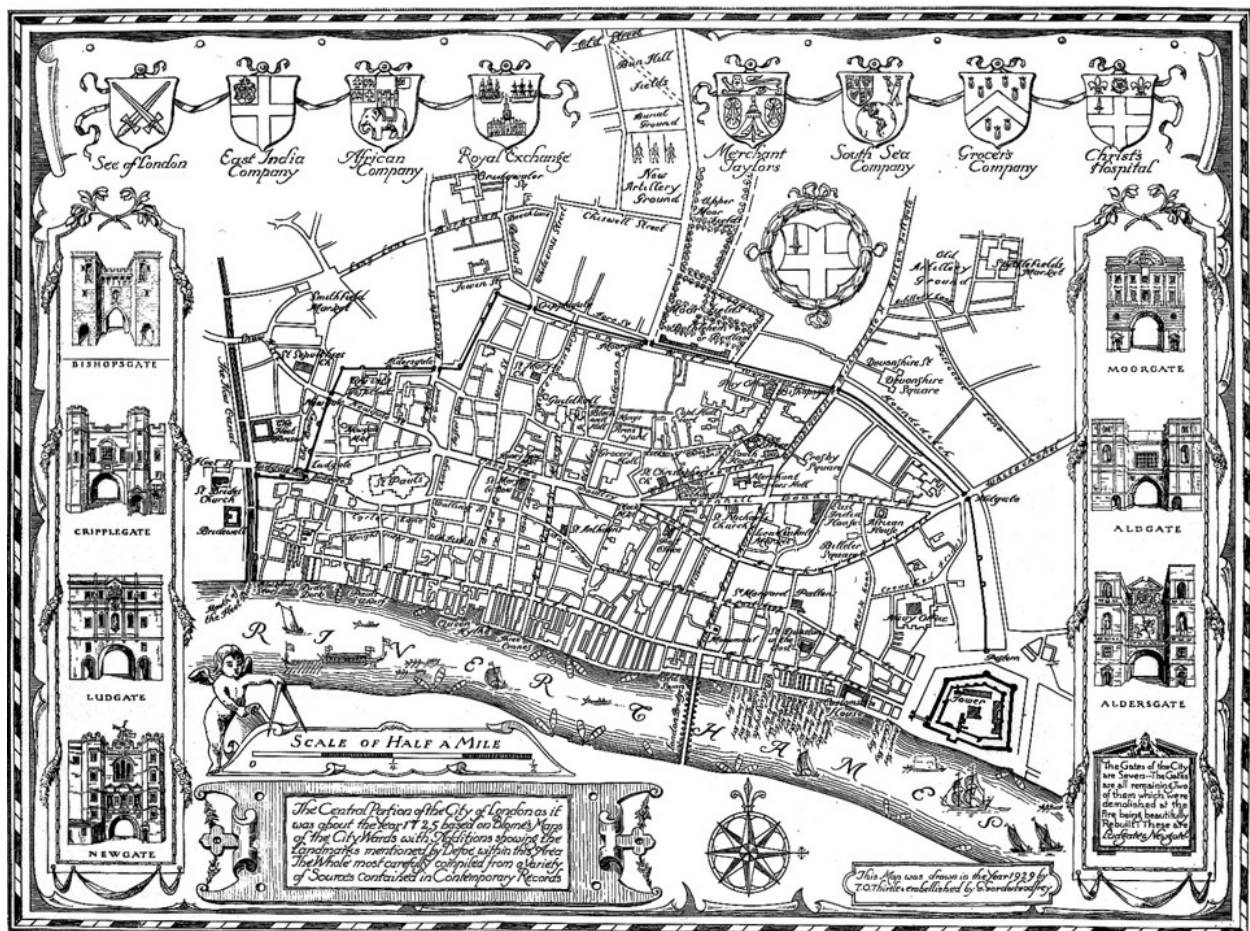


Image courtesy of: Wellcome Images, a website operated by Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation based in the United Kingdom

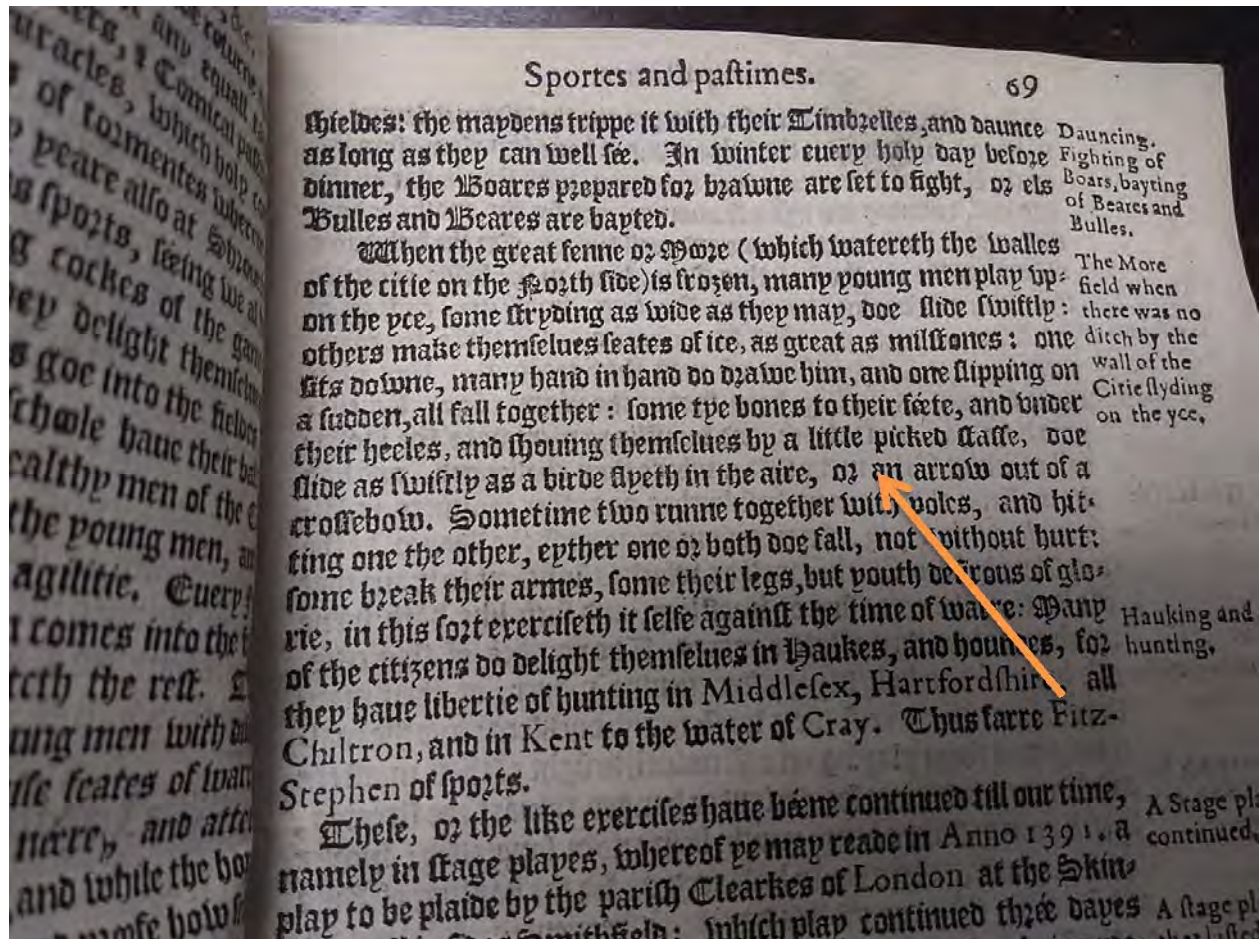
Fitz-Stephen's dislikes of London aren't long or surprising and are echoed by Stowe's similar complaints. Fitz-Stephen mentions excessive drinking, Stowe writes that "quaffing continueth as afore" although it is a practice now out of reach of the poor, so they limit themselves to small beer and ale.¹¹ Frequent building fires were still an ongoing concern but with the current practice of using more stone, slate, and tile in construction, destructive fires were a thing of the past – or so Stowe had thought in 1598.¹² Sports and past-times in the city include participation in miracle and passion plays, and on Shrove-Thursday, "boys will bring their fighting-cocks to school." There might be football games and pageants, or mock jousts. At Easter these games are moved onto to the water where the objective is to hit a target from a moving boat anchored in the middle of the river. There is also dancing, bear baiting and boar fighting during

¹⁰ Stowe, p. 63 (leaf E8r)

¹¹ Stowe, p. 64 (leaf E8v)

¹² Stowe, p. 64 (leaf E8v)

the summer. In winter, a lake in the north freezes and people go sliding and skating.¹³ Fitz-Stephens describes it: "Others there are who are still more expert in these amusements on the ice; they place certain bones, the leg-bones of some animal, under the soles of their feet, by tying them round their ankles, and then taking a pole shod with iron into their hands, they push themselves forward by striking it against the ice, and are carried along with a velocity equal to the flight of a bird, or a bolt discharged from a cross bow."



Stowe does include a mention in his Survey that recently staged plays of "comedies, tragedies, enterludes, and histories, both true and fayned are acted in certaine public places, as the theater, the curtain, etc., have been erected."¹⁴ Does this mean he may have seen Shakespeare perform? The Globe wasn't completed until the year after this publication, but the Lord Chamberlain's Men had already been performing for four years. It's probably impossible to know.

¹³ Pegge suggests that this could be Moor-fields or a pool in Smithfield, or Potpool, although previous translators understand it to be Moorefields.

¹⁴ Stowe, p.69 (leaf F3r)



The remainder of Stowe's Survey describes each of London's twenty-six wards, providing historical context, biographical notes on select citizens, and observations on activities, architecture, and geographic features. It would be interesting to use Stowe's *Survey* as a guide on a walking tour of the City of London to see if anything of Elizabethan England can still be found within its borders today.

[note: Most of the research for this paper was done for a description of the 1772 edition of Fitz-Stephen's *Description of London*, originally written in 1275 for a course in Early Modern studies at University College London. My thanks to Robyn Adams, Senior Research Fellow; Tabitha Tuckett, Rare-Books Librarian; and the staff at UCL Special Collections]