



GLOBE
EDUCATION

LONDON

Although William Shakespeare worked in London theatres, plays were performed outside London; there was a theatre in Bristol, for example. Theatre companies also toured the all over the country, performing outdoors and in town halls. But Shakespeare spent most of his working life in London.

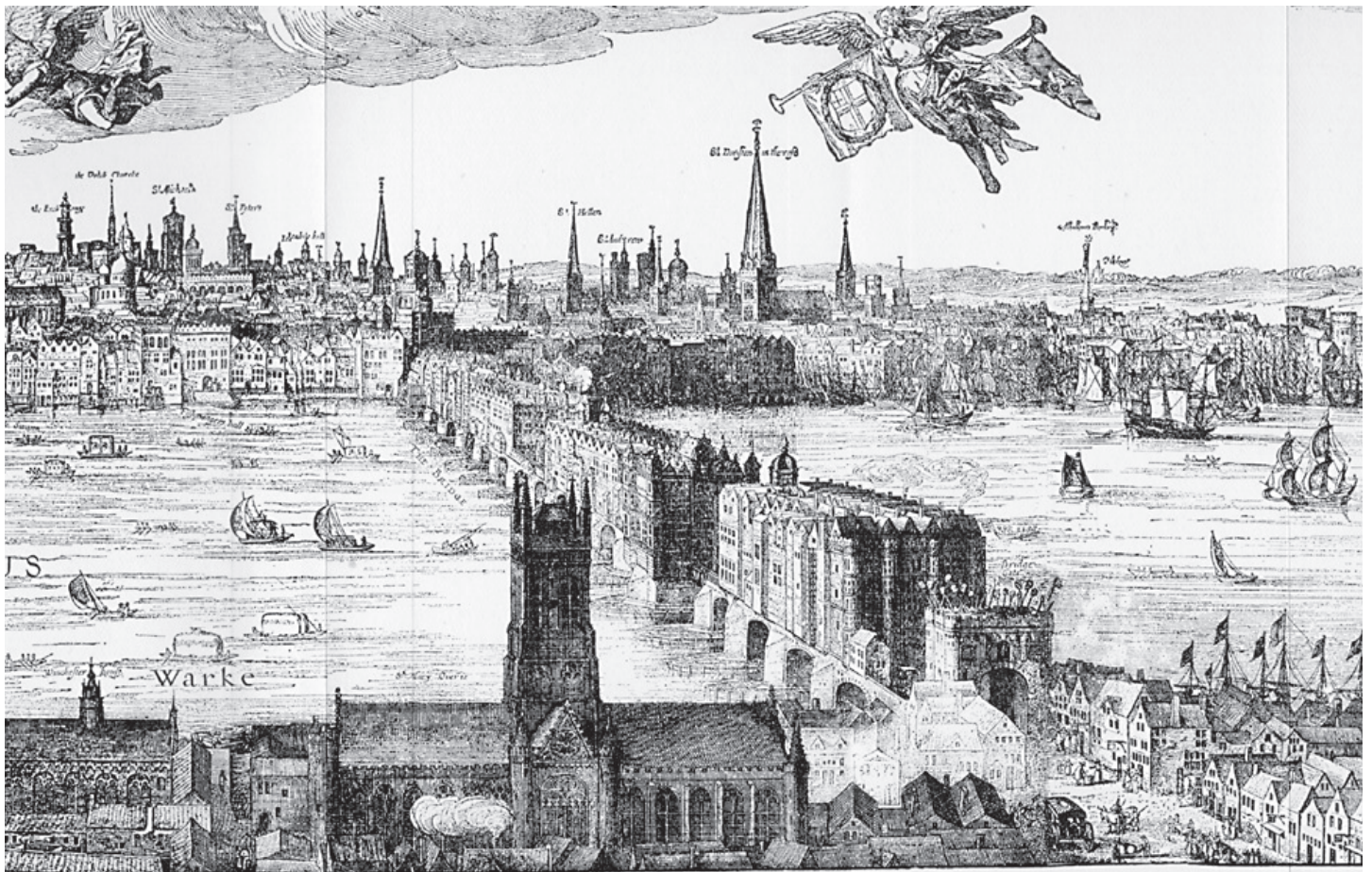
Why London?

London was the biggest and richest city in England; it was the home of the first permanent playhouses. Wealthy traders and manufacturers – and their workers – lived there. They had the money to go to the theatre. By 1600, London's theatre-goers numbered 20,000 per week. London was also home to royalty and much of the nobility. Rich noblemen became patrons of theatre companies, giving financial and legal support. Royalty also supported the theatre. From 1603 to 1613, Shakespeare's company played at the court of King James about 15 times per year.

What was London like?

London wasn't just big; it was also growing fast, mostly due to migrants from the countryside and from Europe. Between 1550 and 1600 it is estimated the city grew from around 50,000 residents to over 200,000. Inside the city's old medieval walls, every available space was being built on. Outside, the suburbs grew steadily into the countryside.

London was a bustling, overcrowded city. In 1599, a Swiss visitor said, "*one simply cannot walk along the streets for the crowds*". Another visitor called the crowded streets "*dark and narrow*". The dark attracted thieves and the overcrowding brought disease. Plague struck most summers; in 1593 about about 10,000 people were killed and all the theatres were closed. In 1607, John Donne called it "*London, plaguey London, full of danger and vice*".



Part of a panorama of London by Claes Van Visscher, 1616, showing London Bridge spanning across the Thames.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Medieval London

This web resource contains pictures and information of daily life, culture and more in Medieval London:

www.museumoflondon.org.uk/london-wall/whats-on/galleries/medieval

What were the city's landmarks?

St Paul's Cathedral was the biggest of London's 120 churches. It had a tower almost 300 feet tall; people could climb to the top. Inside, as well as worship, crowds gathered to socialise or do business – which attracted pick-pockets and prostitutes. Outside, the cathedral was used as a market and it was London's centre for bookselling. There was also an outside pulpit, where, Baron Waldstein said weekly "open air services...last nearly 3 hours".

The Tower of London was London's old medieval fortress. By 1600 it housed rooms for the royal family, a treasury, a prison, a weapons store, a zoo and the royal mint, where nearly all England's coins were made.

London Bridge was the only bridge in London. It joined the City of London, on the north bank of the Thames, with Southwark on the south bank, where the Globe Theatre was. It was about 800 feet long and supported by 20 pillars, through which the river rushed. There were houses and shops either side of the bridge. John Stow, a historian from the time, said that "*it seemeth rather a continual street than a bridge*".

DID YOU KNOW?

London Bridge wasn't the only way to cross the Thames. People who were in a rush, or had money, could pay to cross the river by boats called 'water taxis'. In Shakespeare's time there were around 3,000 of them!

Where did Shakespeare live and work in London?

Shakespeare lived and worked in London from about 1590 to about 1613. But where exactly?

St Helen's: In the mid-1590's, Shakespeare lived in the London parish of St Helens, just north of London Bridge and close to The Theatre and The Curtain playhouses. We know he was twice assessed for taxes there – and failed to pay both times.

Paris Gardens: From about 1598-1602, he seems to have lived in the Paris Gardens area of Bankside south of the river near The Globe, where he worked.

Silver Street: From about 1602, Shakespeare rented lodgings in the Silver Street house of the Mountjoys, a family of French immigrants who made expensive hats.



A market in London in 1598, with the names of the county sellers shown above their stalls.
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