

# Fleet Street in the 1700's

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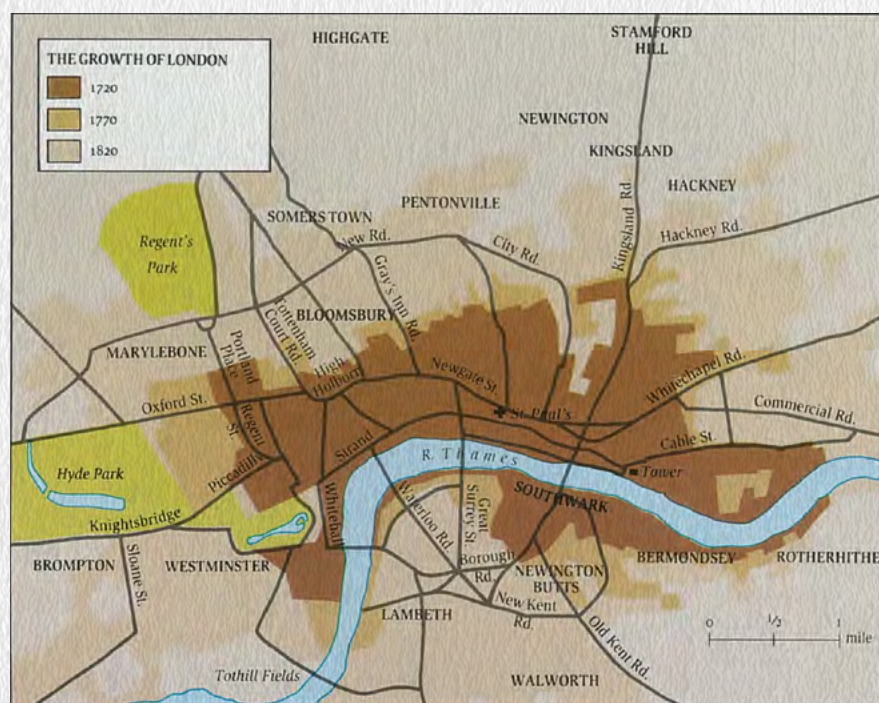
THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

LONDON 2025

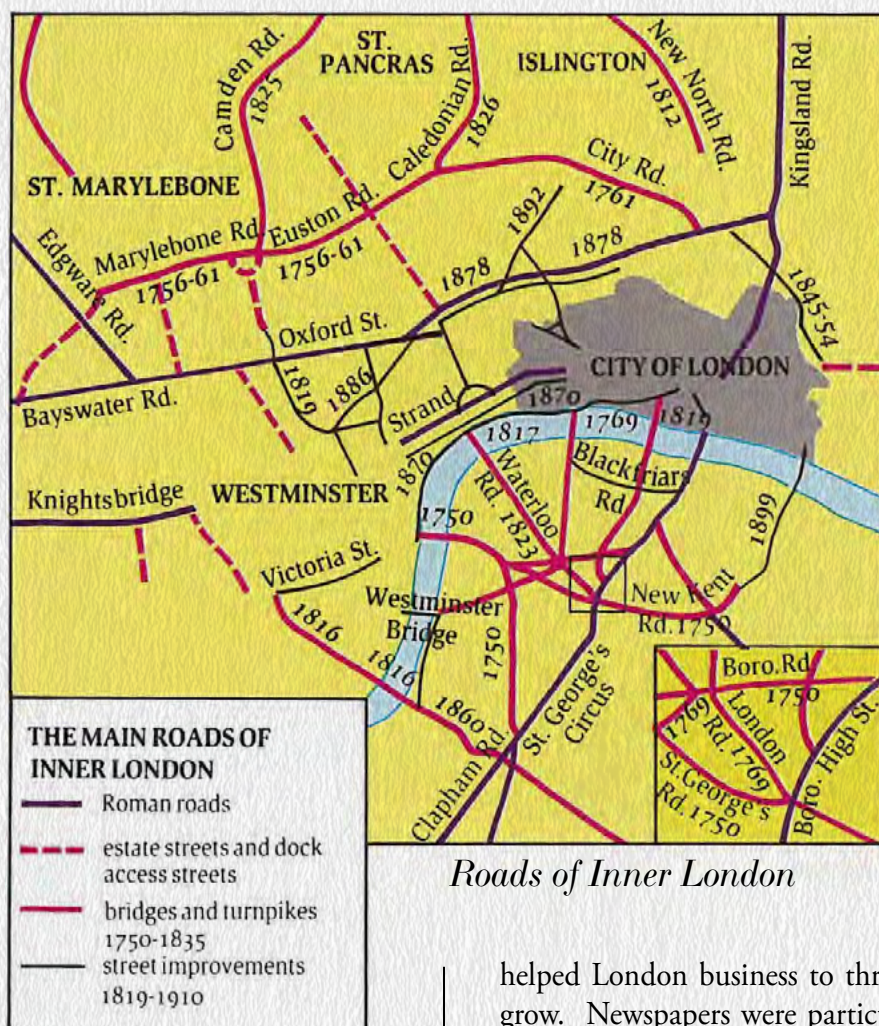
Among the important local and national events of this century were: 1702 – Britain's first daily newspaper, the Daily Courant, published 1710 - St. Paul's Cathedral completed

Problems with the Fleet River had been steadily increasing over the years. It had two bridges. One was at Holborn, but it had a steep hill down to it and a steep one up after it, so it was avoided by heavy carts which were likely to run away. The Fleet Bridge had only a light hill either side, so was more used. The river below the Fleet Bridge had once been deep and fast-flowing but it had silted up gradually. Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke had supervised a very expensive dredging project in the 1670s; lighters were brought in at high tide, and were filled with mud by labourers loading up baskets of silt from the bed of the river. Unfortunately, the silting continued due to activities higher up the river, and by 1736, it was decided to brick over the river, and to create the Fleet Market along the line of the current New Bridge Street.

To the south of Fleet Street and west of the river was the "liberty of the Fleet", also known as Alsatia, which had once been the site of the Whitefriars monastery, and had retained its privilege of sanctuary. It was in many respects outside the law. It became a favoured place for instant marriages, not requiring banns or parental consent, with many houses displaying signs of a male hand joined to a female one, and the legend 'Marriages performed within'. It is said that over half of the marriages recorded in London in the 1740s were within the fleet's boundaries



Growth in the 1700's



Roads of Inner London

The growing population of London required increasing quantities of food. This was provided by increasing the size and capacity of Smithfield market to 5 acres. During the 1740s, 74,000 cattle were herded into the market for slaughter, together with 500,000 sheep. Our present-day traffic jams seem insignificant compared to the problems this must have caused.

London continued to grow. To the east, large areas of modest housing were developed for the incoming tide of artisans and workers while to the west, owners of estates developed squares surrounded by elegant houses. In 1747, several of these owners petitioned Parliament to lay out a new road, now the Euston Road, so that the large number of cattle and sheep would not have to travel along Oxford Street and Holborn to get to Smithfield.

The 1700s were a time of rapidly improving communications. The establishment of turnpike roads provided improved road surfaces. The first stage coach route was established soon after 1700 between London and York. In the mid-1700s it took 10-14 days to travel from Edinburgh to London, but improvements in the roads and the design of coaches had reduced this to 3-4 days 100 years later.

In 1680, William Dockra had introduced the "New and Useful Invention commonly call the Penny Post" whereby letters handed in before 8 am would be delivered anywhere else in London before 10am, and letters to other places would be on their way down one of the 6 post roads. This development

helped London business to thrive, and helped the influence of London to grow. Newspapers were particularly affected as their markets expanded by the growth of literacy and the ease of delivery.'





# Fleet Street in the 1700's Additional notes

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