



Visitors to Covent Garden today are following in the footsteps of the Anglo-Saxon settlers who established their port of Lundenwic.

The 5th to 10th centuries: Anglo-Saxon settlers, Viking marauders

Gradually a new people called the Anglo-Saxons moved in from northern Europe, re-establishing a port just to the west of the Roman city in the area around what is now Covent Garden. Due to their buildings being made of wood and other perishable materials, little evidence of their presence remains, but plenty of information on them can be found at the Museum of London. They had a significant effect on London as we know it today, settling around the original town in remote countryside communities that would eventually grow into the mass of villages making up what is now Greater London. Present day districts whose names end in '-wich', '-ham' and '-ton' are usually Anglo-Saxon in origin (for example Dulwich, Balham and Acton). By the 800s, Lundenwic, as the town was called, was booming - a fact that didn't escape the Vikings. For two hundred years, these intrepid Scandinavian warriors and their longships appeared and reappeared on the Thames, and London was wrestled like a rugby ball in a scrum between native and invading forces.

The Middle Ages: William conquerors, builds to oppress

Power struggles continued to play out until 1066, at which point a duke from Normandy in northern France called William decided to throw his hat into the ring: he invaded and conquered England, and another chapter in London's tumultuous history began. Mindful of the threat posed by the persistent Vikings and the unhappy Anglo-Saxons he now ruled, one of the first tasks for William the Conqueror, as he is best known, was to secure the River Thames, and this is why today we can gaze upon the spectacular Tower of London. Its oldest part, the White Tower, has stood in near perfect condition for almost a thousand years and still captivates the imaginations of locals and visitors alike. There's not much else of Norman London still standing, but what is is worth your attention. In the 12th century the church of St Bartholomew-the-Great was founded, and its chancel has survived the ages, providing an exquisite glimpse at original Norman architecture. St Etheldreda's Church, tucked away nearby on a Holborn cul-de-sac, was built a century later and is also beautifully preserved.

The 16th century: Tudors take charge

As the centuries passed, new scuffles broke

out over who would rule England, and by the end of the 1400s the Tudors were in charge, starting with the reign of Henry VII. He was followed by Henry VIII, whose influence on London is still clearly visible today. He requested his chief adviser Cardinal Wolsey hand over the magnificent Hampton Court Palace, cordoned off what's now Hyde Park to use as a hunting ground, and also built St James's Palace in Westminster, whose original red brick Tudor exterior can be seen from Pall Mall.

The reign of his daughter, Elizabeth I, was something of a golden age for London, as the city became a major European hub for trade, explorers were sent out around the world to reap riches from new lands, and writers like Shakespeare entertained the masses. The capital became extremely wealthy, and immigrants began to pour in. From 1530 to the turn of the century, the population increased from 50,000 to 225,000, and it would double to half a million in the 50 years following that. London was becoming a megacity.

The 1600s: catastrophic blessings

London continued to grow in the 17th century under the Stuarts, Scottish royalty who ascended the English throne in 1603. The city must have seemed like it was unstoppable, but in 1665 the Great Plague broke out. By the time the epidemic had come to its grisly end, one fifth of the population, around 100,000 people, had died. And worse was to come.

It was the conditions so favorable to the spread of the plague - wooden, thatched housing packed along narrow streets - that would set the scene for the next catastrophe. On Sunday 2 September 1666, a fire started in a bakery on Pudding Lane in the heart of the City. Four days later, 80% of medieval London had been incinerated, and with it more than 13,000 houses and almost 100 churches.

Although the Great Fire of London was brutally destructive, it did clear the way for new growth. The ancient street plan remained, but the new buildings were made of stone, and were vastly safer and more sanitary (plague never came back) than their predecessors. Clearly new homes were needed, but so too were churches, and for these, one name rings out: Christopher Wren. A prolifically talented architect, Wren was responsible for designing 52 new churches, including his masterpiece that is St Paul's Cathedral, whose great dome remains an integral and much-loved part of the



St. Paul's Cathedral rose like a phoenix from the flames of the Great Fire and survived World War II bombing, becoming a symbol of the city's resilience.



Buckingham Palace developed as a royal residence in the early 19th century.