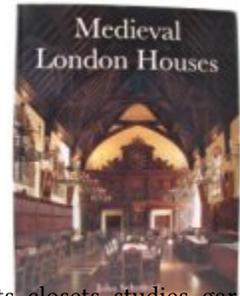


H-Net Reviews

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John Schofield. *Medieval London Houses*. New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1995. 272 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-05578-8.

Reviewed by Candace Robb (independent scholar)
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In *Medieval London Houses*, John Schofield presents a survey of domestic architecture in London from 1200 to 1600 based on the surviving evidence. What is left of medieval and Tudor London? Very little in the way of archaeological evidence. As Schofield explains, it is “rich only in certain areas, such as along the waterfront or increasingly in the area in the north-east of the city, unaffected by the Great Fire.” And of these sites the remains are often merely the underpinnings of a more recent structure. But Schofield uses “documentary records, panoramas, engravings and contemporary surveys (particularly those of John Stow and Ralph Treswell)...to illuminate each other...” (p. 5) as well as the surviving fragments and excavations. The author sticks to facts; the farthest he goes toward speculation is to use evidence from another city of the period.

After an introduction and survey of sources, Schofield proceeds by summarizing the evidence in a series of chapters. “The Topographical Setting” discusses the physical restraints of the site and how they affected the growth of the city; the suburbs and Westminster; defenses; the waterfront; castles, religious houses and parish churches insofar as they were in effect boundaries or defined neighborhoods; public buildings and works; the Dissolution and its effects. “Properties and Buildings” explains the evolution of properties “such as large estates later subdivided then moves closer to examine the four basic domestic types of house found in the city: larger private houses (Type 4), medium-sized and narrow properties (Types 3 and 2), the smallest houses (Type 1), as well as victualling houses, shops, and almshouses.

“Development of Rooms and Open Spaces” describes the evolution of features such as courtyards, gates and porches, halls, solars, parlours, butteries, pantries, count-

ing houses, cellars and undercrofts, closets, studies, garrets, and stairs. “Fabric and Furnishings” considers roof structures, roof coverings, doors, floors, hearths and chimneys, gutters and drains, glazing, paneling, lighting, as well as furniture. “Construction of Medieval and Tudor Houses in London” analyses building techniques as well as materials and styles.

Following these chapters, which constitute half the book, Schofield provides a “Selective Gazetteer of Sites,” a detailed listing of 201 individual sites including a history of ownership where known and a description of remains: anyone wishing to visualize London during the 400 years covered will find this an invaluable resource, complete with maps, sketches, and plans where available, and lists of sources.

The result is a fascinating, detailed study of the evolution of the city of London. Particular properties grew, dramatically changed shape, acquired more space during the drop in population after the plague, changed purpose, were subdivided. And the buildings themselves, originally focusing on a central hall, were gradually broken up into specialized rooms—solars, parlours, butteries, porches, etc. The original purposes of these rooms are often surprising: “...the main purpose of the closet was to be a small chamber off the bedroom, where the occupant could retire for privacy or rest” (p. 81). Regulations speak volumes: time and again the city government would try to enforce regulations against additions that jettied dangerously over city streets or opened into them. In 1276 jetties, pentices and gutters were henceforth to be “at least 9 ft above the ground so as not to impede horsemen” (p. 147). “In 1422 the entrances to many cellars in central or major streets were indicted either for protruding too far into the street or for unsafe

doors; some must have been trap-doors” (p. 79). During the period covered the waterfront continued to expand, suburbs spreading east and west, north and south of the river. With the Dissolution large building complexes became available and were subdivided into rows of shops, inns, and private houses.

This is not an easy book to use. It is not intended as a primer on medieval architecture—no glossary is provided, illustrations are generous but largely unexplained. The reader must have a rudimentary knowledge of medieval and Tudor architecture (a book such as Margaret Wood’s *The English Medieval House* is helpful to keep nearby). I also found it helpful (and also enjoyable) to look at *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, edited by Schofield and to which he frequently refers.

With its gazetteer, this book is obviously not intended to be read through and digested, but referred to on occasion, and thus two sets of keys should have been summarized in a table for quick reference: the key to the letters designating functions of rooms in the plans and a brief description of building Types 1-4. The “key to functions of rooms and open spaces on the plans” is at the end of the preface and acknowledgements: as these letters are critical to understanding the plans as discussed in the text and the gazetteer, they should have been more prominently displayed. A similar problem arises with the

building Types 1-4, which Schofield describes in chapter 3, and refers to thenceforward by number. Also, page numbers are often omitted in order to fit illustrations on pages; in such a large book this can be aggravating.

But these are minor quibbles. I came away from this study confident that what there is to know about domestic architecture in London of the period is in this book. And thus this is a book that accomplishes precisely what the author set out to do, no more, no less. Quite an achievement.

This is an essential book for anyone wishing to describe medieval and Tudor London, to investigate the history of a particular site, to study the growth of the city, or to understand the evolution of London domestic architecture.

References: *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, J. Schofield ed., London Topographical Society, no. 135, 1987.

Margaret Wood, *The English Medieval House*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1983.

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