Introduction

It is a normal morning in London, on Friday 16 July 1591. In the wide street known as Cheapside the people are about their business, going between the timber-covered market stalls. Traders are calling out, hoping to attract the attention of merchants' wives. Travellers and gentlemen are walking along the recently repaired pavements of the street, going in and out of the goldsmiths' and moneylenders' shops. Servants and housewives are making their way through the market crowds to the Little Conduit near the back gate to the churchyard of St Paul's Cathedral, some with leather water vessels in their arms, others with casks suspended from a yoke across their shoulders. The morning sun is reflected by the glass in the upper windows of the rich merchants' houses. A maid looks down on those in the street as she cleans her master's bedchamber.

Suddenly there is a great commotion near the market. 'Repent, England! Repent!' yells a man at the top of his voice. He is dressed in black, handing out printed leaflets as he strides along. 'Repent!' he shouts again and again, 'Christ Jesus is come with his fan in his hand to judge the Earth!' This man is no mean fool; he is a prosperous London citizen, Mr Edmund Coppinger. Another gentleman, Mr Henry Arthington, also dressed in black, is following him, striding from the alley called Old Change into Cheapside. He too calls out, declaring that 'Judgement Day has come upon us all! Men will rise up and kill each other as butchers do swine, for the Lord Jesus has risen.' The printed bills they hand out declare that they are intent on a complete reformation of the Church in England. For the illiterate majority in the crowd, they call out their message: 'The bishops must be put down! All clergymen should be equal! Queen Elizabeth has forfeited her crown and is worthy to be deprived of her kingdom. Jesus Christ has come again. The reborn Messiah is even now in

London, in the form of William Hacket. Every man and woman should acknowledge him as a divine being and lord of all Christendom.'

William Hacket himself is still lying in bed, in a house in the parish of St Mary Somerset. He cuts an unlikely figure as a latter-day messiah. His memory is excellent – he can recall whole sermons and then repeat them in the taverns, adding amusing jokes. He married a woman for her dowry, then spent it and abandoned her. He is well known as a womaniser, but he is even more famous for his uncontrollable and violent temper. Anyone who witnessed his behaviour in the service of Mr Gilbert Hussey will confirm this. When a schoolmaster insulted Mr Hussey, Hacket met with him in a tavern and pretended to try to smooth over the disagreement. After he had won the schoolmaster's trust, he put a friendly arm around his shoulders. Then, suddenly, he seized the man, threw him to the floor, flung himself on top of him and bit off his nose. When he held up the piece of flesh, the astonished onlookers entreated him to allow the bleeding schoolmaster to take it quickly to a surgeon so that it might be sewn back on, preventing a horrible disfigurement. Hacket merely laughed, put the nose in his mouth and swallowed it.

In his bed, Hacket knows what Mr Coppinger and Mr Arthington are up to: he himself gave them instructions earlier this morning. They believe he is the reborn Christ largely because he is such a persuasive and fervent character. Together they have been hatching a plot for the last six months to destroy the bishops and undermine the queen's rule. They have spoken to hundreds of people and distributed thousands of pamphlets. What Hacket does not know is that a huge crowd has started to swarm around his two prophesying angels. Some are curious, some are laughing at their proclamations; others want to join them. Most want to see Hacket in person. Such a large crowd is pressing against them that soon Mr Arthington and Mr Coppinger are trapped. They seek refuge in a nearby tavern, The Mermaid, and manage to escape by the back door, before returning to the parish of St Mary Somerset and their slugabed messiah.

News runs through the city. By noon the city watchmen are marching from house to house. By one o'clock all three men have been sought out by the authorities and arrested. Within two weeks, two of them are dead. Hacket is tried for high treason, found guilty and sentenced to death. On 28 July he is dragged on a hurdle to the gallows, hanged while he spits abuse at the hangman, then cut down

and beheaded and butchered in the traditional manner, his headless body being cut into four parts, each with a limb attached. Mr Coppinger dies in prison: the authorities claim he starved himself to death. Mr Arthington enlists the support of powerful friends on the privy council and thereby saves his life, publishing his renunciation of all the things he has said as part of his penance.[1]

This is an unusual episode and yet it is evocative of Elizabethan England. Had it taken place two hundred years earlier, Hacket and his gentlemen supporters would have been given a wide berth by the nervous citizens, unused to such sacrilegious uproar. Had it taken place two hundred years later, these events would have been a cause for popular ridicule and a cartoonist's wit. But Elizabeth's England is different. It is not that it lacks self-confidence, but that its self-confidence is easily shaken. The seriousness with which the authorities treat the plot, and the ruthless efficiency with which they suppress it, are typical of the time. It is not every day that a man is publicly proclaimed as the risen Christ, and it is extraordinary that well-respected gentlemen believe the messiah to be a violent, philandering, illiterate lout; but it is not at all unusual for Elizabethan people to adopt an extreme religious viewpoint, or for them to fear the overthrow of the monarch. The last few decades have seen so much change that people simply do not know what to believe or think any more. They have become used to living with slow-burning crises that might, at any moment, flare up into life-threatening situations.

This picture of Elizabethan England will come as a surprise to some readers. In the twenty-first century we are used to hearing a far more positive view of Elizabeth's 'sceptred isle'. We refer to the queen herself as Gloriana. We think of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and Sir Francis Drake circumnavigating the globe in the *Golden Hind*. We think of writers such as Francis Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh, the poets Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney, and the playwrights Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Surely a society that created such architectural masterpieces as Hardwick Hall, Burghley, Longleat and Wollaton Hall cannot be said to be anything other than triumphal? Surely a small kingdom that sends mariners into battle off the coast of Central America cannot be accused of self-doubt?

The problem is that our view of history diminishes the reality of the past. We concentrate on the historic event as something that *has* happened and in so doing we ignore it as a moment which, at the

time, *is* happening. For example, when we hear the word 'Armada', we think of an English victory, in which the threatening Spanish ships were scattered and defeated in the battle of Gravelines and after which Sir Francis Drake was feted as a hero. Yet at the moment of attack everything was up in the air. As Drake boarded his ship at Plymouth, he would have known that there was a real possibility of the Armada landing successfully and his own ship being sunk. He would have known that a change in the direction of the wind could alter everything – leaving his strategy in jeopardy and his fleet in danger. We can no longer imagine the possibility of the Armada disgorging its troops on English beaches. Our view of the event as a thing of the past restricts our understanding of contemporary doubts, hopes and reality.

I wrote my first *Time Traveller's Guide* in order to suggest that we do not always need to describe the past objectively and distantly. In that book I tried to bring the medieval period closer to the reader, describing what you would find if you could visit fourteenth-century England. Where would you stay? What might you wear? What would you eat? How should you greet people? Given that we know so much about the period, it stands to reason that the historian should be able to answer such questions. There are limits, of course: the historian cannot break through the evidence barrier and actually re-create the past. Moreover, imagining a personal visit is decidedly tricky in some matters of detail. You may well understand why the earl of Essex rebelled against Elizabeth in 1601 – but how did he clean his teeth? Did he wear underwear? What did he use for toilet paper? These things aren't so well evidenced. We must exploit what little evidence there is to satisfy, if only partially, our collective spirit of enquiry.

What will strike you first if you visit Elizabethan England? I imagine that, to start with, it will be the smells of the towns and cities. After a few days, however, I suspect it will be the uncertainty of life. You will be appalled to see dead bodies lying in the street during an epidemic of influenza or plague, and the starving beggars in their filthy rags. You will be disconcerted to notice vulnerability even at the top of society. Elizabeth herself is the target of several assassination attempts and uprisings – from a gentry rebellion, to her physician supposedly trying to poison her. Uncertainty pervades every aspect of life. People do not know whether the Sun goes round the Earth or the Earth goes round the Sun; the doctrines of the Church contradict the claims of Copernicus. The rich merchants of London do not

know if their ships will be stranded in a North African port, with the crews massacred by Barbary pirates and their cargo stolen. To gauge what Elizabethan life is like we need to see the panic-stricken men and women who hear that the plague has arrived in the next village. We need to see the farmers in the 1590s, staring at their rain-beaten, blackened corn for the second year in succession. This is the reality for many Elizabethan people: the stark horror that they have nothing to feed to their sick and crying children. We need to appreciate that such people, be they Protestant or Catholic, may well connect their starvation with the government's meddling with religious beliefs and traditions. We need to see them looking for something stable in their lives and fixing on the queen herself as a beacon of hope. Do not imagine the proud figure of Queen Elizabeth standing stiff and unruffled in her great jewelled dress on the deck of a serene ship, floating on calm sunlit waters. Rather imagine her struggling to maintain her position on the ship of state in heaving seas, tying herself to the mast and yelling orders in the storm. This is the real Gloriana – Elizabeth, queen of England by the grace of God, the pillar of faith and social certainty in the dizzying upheaval of the sixteenth century.

Like all societies, Elizabethan England is full of contradictions. Some practices will impress you as enormously sophisticated and refined; others will strike you with horror. People are still burnt alive for certain forms of heresy, and women are burnt for killing their husbands. The heads of traitors are still exhibited over the great Stone Gate in London, left there to rot and be a deterrent to others. Torture is permitted in order to recover information about treasonable plots. The gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is as great as ever and, as this book will show, society is strictly hierarchical. Humble houses – sometimes whole villages – are destroyed to make room for the parks of the nobility. People still starve to death on the high roads. As for the political situation, a brief note by a government official describes the state of the nation at the start of the reign:

> The queen poor, the realm exhausted, the nobility poor and decayed. Want of good captains and soldiers. The people out of order. Justice not executed. All things dear. Excess in meat, drink and apparel. Divisions among ourselves. Wars with France and Scotland. The French king bestriding the realm, having one foot in Calais and the other in Scotland. Steadfast enmity but no friendship abroad.[2]

This description is far removed from the 'golden age' interpretation of Elizabeth's reign – but there are at least as many positive contemporary verdicts as there are negative ones. In 1577, Raphael Holinshed publishes a chronicle in which he describes Elizabeth's accession in the following words:

> After all the stormy, tempestuous and blustering windy weather of Queen Mary was overblown, the darksome clouds of discomfort dispersed, the palpable fogs and mist of the most intolerable misery consumed, and the dashing showers of persecution overpast: it pleased God to send England a calm and quiet season, a clear and lovely sunshine, a *quietus est* from former broils of a turbulent estate, and a world of blessings by good Queen Elizabeth.

Holinshed is addressing a Protestant minority who are literate and wealthy enough to buy an expensive two-volume publication. But we do not need to look through his rose-tinted spectacles to see many national achievements and cheering developments. Elizabeth's reign sees an extraordinary period of wealth creation and artistic endeavour. English explorers, driven by the desire for profit, proceed into the cold waters of Baffin Island and the Arctic Circle north of Russia. Despite the wars with France and Spain, no fighting takes place on home soil, so that for most Englishmen the whole reign is one of peace. In addition to the famous poetry and plays, it is an age of innovation in science, gardening, publishing, theology, history, music and architecture. Two English sea captains circumnavigate the world – proving to sixteenth-century people that they have at last exceeded the knowledge of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. No longer do thinking men claim they can see further than the ancients by virtue of their being 'dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants'. They have grown to be 'giants' themselves.

One of the most striking differences between Elizabethan England and its forerunners lies in the queen herself. Elizabeth's personality and the rule of a woman are two things that make England in 1558–1603 a very different place from the England of Edward III or even that of her father, Henry VIII. More than ever before, the character of the monarch is intrinsically woven into the daily lives of her people. She is without doubt the most powerful Englishwoman in history.[3] It is impossible to write about everyday life in her reign without reference

to her. Her choice to steer England away from the Catholicism of her sister, Mary, and to re-establish an independent Church of England, as pioneered by Henry VIII, affects every person in every parish throughout the realm. Even if her subjects accept her religious choices, and never raise their heads above the religious parapet, her decision-making touches their lives in numerous ways. The Prayer Book changes, church symbols are torn down and bishops are replaced. An individual might become *persona non grata* just because of his or her religious doubts. If ever there was an argument that rulers can change the lives of their subjects, it lies in the impact of the Tudor monarchs. Elizabeth's kingdom is very much *Elizabethan* England.

This book follows my medieval guide but it does not entirely adopt the same form. It would be tedious to make all the same observations about aspects of daily life that contrast with our own society. Moreover, in writing about Elizabethan England, it would be inappropriate to follow exactly the same formula developed to describe the realm of two hundred years earlier. It is not possible, for example, to relegate religion to a subsection in this book: it has to be a chapter on its own, being integral to the ways in which Elizabethans live their lives. The England of 1558 has much in common with the kingdom in 1358, but a great deal has changed. As a result this book is not only concerned with the way Elizabethan England compares with the present day; it also examines how it compares with, or differs from, its medieval roots.

The historian is always a middleman: the facilitator of the reader's understanding of the past. I am no different, even though this book is written in the present tense and based on the premise that the most direct way to learn about something is to see it for yourself. However, in a book like this, my relationship with the evidence is unusual. Obviously literary texts have been important (plays, poetry, travellers' accounts, diaries, contemporary surveys), as have a wide range of printed records. But making sense of all this evidence as indicative of lived behaviour requires the historian to draw on personal experience. As I put it in *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*, 'The key to learning something about the past might be a ruin or an archive but the means whereby we may understand is – and always will be – ourselves.' This goes for the reader's lived experience too. For example, I presume that readers of this book have not seen a bull-baiting contest, but yet have enough life experience to imagine what

is involved, and thus to know that the Elizabethans' love of this form of entertainment makes them profoundly different from modern English people.

I have been reluctant to include details from outside the period of the reign. Very occasionally I have cited post-1603 evidence, but only in order to illustrate a procedure or practice that certainly existed before 1603. There is more citation of pre-1558 sources: much of Elizabethan England is composed of relics from the late medieval and earlier Tudor periods. This applies obviously to the castles, town walls, streets and churches; but it also applies to books that were printed for the first time in earlier reigns and which are reread and often reprinted in Elizabethan times. It especially applies to legislation: most of the law is based on medieval precedents, and it goes without saying that all the laws in force at Elizabeth's accession date from an earlier period. It is important to remember that every house and structure that we call 'medieval' or 'Tudor', because of its date of construction, is also Elizabethan. The same applies to many phrases and customs that were in use and practised before 1558. On this point, readers will note several references to the wonderful Latin phrasebook *Vulgaria* by William Horman, first published in 1519 (I used the 1530 edition). Horman is vividly expressive of the most basic aspects of daily life, so we learn that 'unwashed wool that grows between the hind legs of a black sheep is medicinable' and 'some women with child have wrong appetite to eat things that be out of rule: as coals'. As his purpose was to provide daily Latin in order to encourage the resurgence of the spoken language, we can be confident these examples reflect the experiences of his readers. And while anything written by him about fashionable clothes or religion is, of course, hugely out of date by 1558, what he says about some pregnant women's appetites is as true today as it was in 1519. Bearing in mind these caveats, I have done my best faithfully to represent England as it existed between Elizabeth's accession on 17 November 1558 and her death on 24 March 1603.

Welcome, then, to Elizabethan England, and all its doubts, certainties, changes, traditions and contradictions. It is a jewel-encrusted muddy kingdom, glittering and starving, hopeful and fearful in equal measure – always on the point of magnificent discoveries and brutal rebellions.

1

The Landscape

Different societies see landscapes differently. You may look at Elizabethan England and see a predominantly green land, characterised by large open fields and woodlands, but an Elizabethan yeoman will describe his homeland to you in terms of cities, towns, ports, great houses, bridges and roads. In your eyes it may be a sparsely populated land – the average density being less than sixty people per square mile in 1561 (compared to well over a thousand today) – but a contemporary description will mention overcrowding and the problems of population expansion.[1] Describing a landscape is thus a matter of perspective: your priorities affect what you see. Asked to describe their county, most Devonians will mention the great city of Exeter, the ports of Dartmouth, Plymouth and Barnstaple and the dozens of market towns. They will generally neglect to mention that the region is dominated by a great moor, Dartmoor, 2,000 ft high in places and more than 200 square miles in expanse. There are no roads across this wasteland, only trackways. Elizabethans see it as good for nothing but pasture, tin mining and the steady water supply it provides by way of the rivers that rise there. Many people are afraid of such moors and forests. They are 'the ruthless, vast and gloomy woods . . . by nature made for murders and for rapes', as Shakespeare writes in *Titus Andronicus.* Certainly no one will think of Dartmoor as beautiful. Sixteenth-century artists paint wealthy people, prosperous cities and food, not landscapes.

The underlying reasons for such differences are not hard to find. In a society in which people still starve to death, an orchard is not a beautiful thing in itself: its beauty lies in the fact that it produces apples and cider. A wide flat field is 'finer' than rugged terrain, for it can be tilled easily to produce wheat and so represents good white bread. A small thatched cottage, which a modern viewer might

consider pretty, will be considered unattractive by an Elizabethan traveller, for cottagers are generally poor and able to offer little in the way of hospitality. Ranges of hills and mountains are obstacles to Elizabethan travellers and very far from picturesque features that you go out of your way to see. Hills might feature in an Elizabethan writer's description of a county because of their potential for sheep grazing, but on the whole he will be more concerned with listing all the houses of the gentry, their seats and parks.

It is worth being aware of these differences at the outset. It is precisely those things that Elizabethans take for granted that you will find most striking: the huge open fields, the muddy roads, and the small size of so many labourers' houses. Indeed, it is only at the very end of the Elizabethan period, in the late 1590s, that people start to use the term 'landscape' to describe a view. Before this, they do not need such a word, for they do not see a 'landscape' as such – only the constituent elements that mean something to them: the woods, fields, rivers, orchards, gardens, bridges, roads and, above all else, the towns. Shakespeare does not use the word 'landscape' at all; he uses the word 'country' – a concept in which people and physical things are intimately bound together. Therefore, when you describe the Elizabethan landscape as it appears to you, you are not necessarily describing the 'country' as Elizabethan people see it. Every act of seeing is unique – and that is as true for an Elizabethan farmer looking at his growing corn as it is for you now, travelling back to the sixteenth century.

Towns

Stratford-upon-Avon lies in the very heart of England, about ninety-four miles north-west of London. The medieval parish church stands at the southern end of the town, only a few yards from the River Avon that flows lazily in a gradual curve along the east side. A squat wooden spire stands on top of the church tower. If you look north, you will see the handsome stone bridge of fourteen arches built by Sir Hugh Clopton in the 1490s. Cattle graze in the wide meadow on the far bank; there is a small wooden bridge downstream where the mill looks over the narrowing of the river.

Standing in this part of Stratford in November 1558, at the very

start of Elizabeth's reign, you may well think that the town has barely changed since the Middle Ages. If you walk towards the centre, most of the buildings you see are medieval. Directly opposite as you leave the churchyard is the stone quadrangle of the college, founded in the 1330s by Stratford's most notable son, John Stratford, archbishop of Canterbury. Passing an orchard and a couple of low, two-storey thatched cottages, you come to a muddy corner: turn right into Church Street. Looking ahead, you will see the regular divisions of the tenements. These are substantial timber-framed houses, many of them the full width of sixty feet laid down when the town was planned in the twelfth century.[2] A hundred yards further along on your right are the almshouses of the medieval Guild of the Holy Cross. These make up a line of timber-framed, two-storey buildings with unglazed windows, tiled roofs and jetties that project out above the street at a height of six feet. Beyond is the grammar school and hall of the Guild, a similar long, low building, with whitewashed timbers and wooden struts across the windows. Adjacent is the chapel of the Guild, with its handsome stone tower. Its clock chimes on the hour as you step along the muddy street in the damp autumn air.

Keep walking. On your right, directly across the lane from the chapel, is the most prestigious house in the town: New Place, built by Sir Hugh Clopton – the man who constructed the bridge. It is three storeys high and timber-framed, with brick between the timbers, not willow and plaster work. Five bays wide, it has one large window on either side of the central porch, five windows on the floor above and five on the floor above that. Each of the top-floor windows is set in a gable looking out across the town. The whole proud edifice is a fitting tribute to a successful businessman. In 1558, Sir Hugh is the second-most-famous man of Stratford (after the archbishop), and a figure greatly admired by the townsfolk. The boys leaving the grammar school and walking back into the centre of the town regard this building as a statement of success. A future pupil, William Shakespeare, will eventually follow in Sir Hugh's footsteps, make his fortune in London and return to live out his last days in this very house.

As you continue along the street, you come across a few narrower buildings, where the old tenements have been divided to create widths of thirty feet (half a plot), twenty (one-third) or just fifteen feet. The narrower houses tend to be taller: three storeys, with timber jetties

projecting out a foot or so further at each level. Unlike some towns, however, the houses in Stratford do not shut out the light with their overhanging upper storeys. Those market towns that were carefully planned in the Middle Ages have such wide thoroughfares that plenty of light enters the front parlours and workshops. Here in the High Street you will find glovers, tailors and butchers as well as a couple of wealthy mercers and a wool merchant.[3] Six days a week they will set up their shop boards in the street and place their wares on them to show to passers-by. Most have wooden signs – depicting dragons, lions, unicorns, cauldrons, barrels – hanging by metal hooks from projecting wooden arms. Note that the symbols painted on the signs are not necessarily related to the trade practised: a goldsmith's shop may well be called 'The Green Dragon' and a glover might work by the sign of 'The White Hart'. On your right, leading down to the pasture on the riverbank, is Sheep Street, where more wool merchants live and wool and animals are traded. On your left, in Ely Street, swine change hands. Carry on along the High Street for another hundred yards or so and you will come to the main market cross: a covered area where needle-makers, hosiers and similar artificers sell their goods. Beyond is the principal market place, Bridge Street. This is more of a long rectangular open space than a street – or, at least, it used to be: the centre is now filled with stalls and shops at street level and domestic lodgings on the floors above.

At this point, if you turn right you will see Sir Hugh Clopton's magnificent bridge over a wide shallow stretch of the river. Turn left and you will find two streets of timber-framed houses. One of these is Wood Street, which leads to the cattle market. The other, leading north-west, is Henley Street. Go along here, and on the right-hand side you'll find the house occupied by the glover, John Shakespeare, his wife Mary and their firstborn daughter, Joan. Like almost all the other houses in the borough, this has a wattle-and-plaster infill between the beams, with a low roof covering its three bays. This is the house in which their gifted son will be born in April 1564.

At this end of Henley Street you are almost at the edge of town. If you carry on for another hundred yards you will find yourself on the road to Henley-in-Arden. As always on the outskirts of a town, you will smell the noxious fumes of the laystall or midden that serves the nearby residents. John Shakespeare has been known to use part of his own tenement as a laystall, but he also maintains a tanyard at the

back of his house, where he prepares the leather for his gloves – and nothing stinks quite as much as a tanyard. A walk around the back of these houses in Henley Street reveals that Mr Shakespeare is not alone in making practical use of his tenement for refuse disposal. Many of his neighbours do likewise, disposing of fish and animal entrails, faeces, vegetable matter and old rushes from floors in the dumps on the edge of the great field at the back of their property. If you peer into the messy back yards of those whitewashed timber-framed houses, you can also see vegetable gardens, dunghills, orchards of apple, pear and cherry trees, henhouses, cart houses and barns – places to dispose of rotten food and places to grow new. You might say that Stratford appears to be as much a town of farmers as craftsmen. Many of these outhouses are thatched: a marked contrast to the smart tiles of the houses facing the street. Note that some of the older houses have free-standing kitchen buildings in their gardens; notice too how several gardens have pigs, fed with detritus from the kitchens.

At this point you may wonder again at the medieval aspect of the place. The middens of Stratford stink as much as they did two hundred years ago, and its houses are still predominantly built with timber frames. Many of them are well over a hundred years old. The boundaries and layout of the borough have hardly altered since 1196. The market places have not been moved. What has changed?

The most significant changes are not physically apparent; they are less tangible. For example, Stratford received a charter of incorporation from Edward VI in 1553 and now, five years later, is governed by a bailiff, aldermen and the most important burgesses. Before 1547 the town was administered by the Guild. Now that has been dissolved and its property has passed to the new town corporation. Although the town in 1558 looks much as it did in 1500, it has altered radically in its governance. Moreover, it is not so much a question of what has *changed* as what is *changing*. Most of the medieval houses that still stand in 1558 are hall-houses: one or two ground-floor rooms (a hall and a chamber) with packed-earth floors, open to the roof, and a hearth in the centre of the hall. They do not have chimneys. But just consider what a difference a chimney makes: it allows one heated room to be built on top of another. In this way, a large number of rooms can be built on the same ground as one old hall. No doubt the building that once stood on the patch of John Shakespeare's house was a hall-house; its replacement has back-to-back fireplaces and a

stack rising through the whole house, giving heat to two downstairs and two upstairs chambers. Another stack rises at the far end, heating the workshop and the chamber above. Many of John's neighbours are still living in single-storey houses; but already in November 1558, Stratford, like all the other small towns in England, has started to grow – not outwards so much as upwards.

You will see exactly how fast Stratford is changing if you return forty years later, in 1598, towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. The church is still there, the roads have not changed, the Guild buildings and school have not been substantially altered – but more than half the town has been rebuilt. This is partly due to two catastrophic fires in 1594 and 1595, which destroy 120 houses, making about a quarter of the population homeless. There are now many more brick chimneys and consequently many more tall houses. In fact, brick is one of the keys to change. The affordable production of a durable and fireproof chimney material means that two- and three-storey houses can be built even in places where stone is scarce and masonry expensive. Walk back down Henley Street, across the market place and back into the High Street, and you'll see that the whole skyline has changed. Almost all the houses on your right are now three storeys high, displaying much more elegance and symmetry in their timber construction, with more carved woodwork on the beams facing the street. Some of these houses have greased paper or cloth under a lattice in their windows to allow in a little light while keeping out draughts, but others now have glass in the street-facing chambers. Glass, which is very rare in town houses in 1558, becomes available to the reasonably well-off in the 1570s.[4] Not all of the new buildings facing the street will have been constructed with glass windows in mind, for it is still difficult to get hold of in 1598; but most people with disposable income will try to obtain it – importing it in pre-constructed frames from Burgundy, Normandy or Flanders, if they cannot get hold of English glass. Nor will a householder necessarily equip his whole house with glass at once: he might install it in his hall and parlour and leave the other, less-important rooms unglazed. In 1558 a chimney is the prime status symbol to show off to the neighbours. In 1598 it is glazing.

A less desirable aspect of the changes being wrought in Stratford is the accommodation of the poor. You might think that barn conversions are a feature of the modern world, but a glimpse at the back yards of some properties will tell you otherwise. Quite a few old

barns are let out to paupers who have nowhere else to go. The population of Stratford in 1558 is about 1,500; by 1603 it has swelled to 2,500.[5] And that latter figure probably does not include all the poor and vagrants in and around the town – one report in 1601 mentions that the corporation is struggling to cope with 700 paupers. Now you can see why the well-off are living ostentatiously in handsome, glazed houses: it separates them from the have-nots. You can see why William Shakespeare, the son of the glover, is so proud of having acquired New Place in 1597, with its brick, glazed windows and chimneys – a far cry from the smelly house where he spent his boyhood (and where his aged father still lives). And you can see why William's wife, Anne, is pleased to be living in New Place rather than the two-room farmhouse in Shottery where she grew up. There the hall was open to the rafters, with an earth floor, as was the chamber that she shared with her seven siblings. True, at New Place she has to cope with her husband being away in London for long periods of time, but, in the sixteen years since her marriage in 1582, she has seen her living standards undergo an extraordinary transformation, partly due to having more money and partly due to the changes in what that money can buy.

What is true for Stratford and its inhabitants also applies to other urban settlements. In 1600 there are twenty-five cathedral cities and 641 market towns in England and Wales.[6] The rebuilding they are all undergoing makes it impossible to compare them in size, for their populations are changing rapidly. London, for example, has a population of about 70,000 in 1558 and about 200,000 in 1603; it moves from being the sixth-largest city in Europe (after Naples, Venice, Paris, Antwerp and Lisbon) to being the third (after Naples, with 281,000 inhabitants, and Paris, with 220,000).[7] Some other English towns are growing in similarly dramatic fashion. Plymouth, for example, has a population of 3,000–4,000 at the start of the reign and 8,000 at the end. Newcastle also doubles in size over the years 1530–1600. On the other hand, in some places the numbers are static: Exeter is home to about 8,000 people throughout the sixteenth century. A few towns are even shrinking in population, such as Salisbury and Colchester, both of which have 2,000 fewer souls in 1600 than in the mid-1520s. But the overall growth is noticeable from the fact that in the mid-1520s only ten towns have a population of more than 5,000; by 1600 this number has risen to twenty.[8]

The Most Populous Towns and Cities in England in 1600[9]

No.	Place capital letters denote a city *denotes a port	Estimated population
1	LONDON*	200,000
2	NORWICH	15,000
3	YORK	12,000
4	BRISTOL*	12,000
5	Newcastle*	10,000
6	EXETER*	8,000
7	Plymouth*	8,000
8	Coventry	6,000
9	SALISBURY	6,000
10	Lynn*	6,000
11	GLOUCESTER*	6,000
12	CHESTER*	6,000
13	Kingston upon Hull*	6,000
14	Ipswich*	5,000
15	CANTERBURY	5,000
16	Colchester	5,000
17	WORCESTER	5,000
18	Great Yarmouth*	5,000
19	OXFORD	5,000
20	Cambridge	5,000

Several points emerge from the above table. First, although Stratford-upon-Avon is not what you would call a large town, with just 2,500 inhabitants in 1600, only twenty towns in England are twice as populous. Thus we might say that Stratford is truly representative of the majority of towns in England and Wales. Second, only half of the twenty-two English cathedral cities are in the above list. The other eleven – Winchester, Carlisle, Durham, Ely, Lincoln, Hereford, Lichfield, Rochester, Chichester, Peterborough and Wells – all have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, so you should not assume that a city is a populous place. Third, eleven of the twenty most-populous towns

are ports (twelve if we include York, which has a modest quay). In fact, the fastest-growing large towns – London, Newcastle and Plymouth – are all sea ports, reminding us that a world of opportunities is opening up to Elizabethans through the island's long coastline and geographical position.[10] Medieval people saw the sea as a barrier or frontier. Under the Tudor monarchs it comes to be recognised as one of the country's greatest natural resources.

The most significant point implicit in the table of populous towns is more subtle. If you compare it with a similar table for medieval England you will see that it reveals a process of urbanisation. The towns on the above list are home to 336,000 people; the twenty largest towns in 1380 had fewer than half this number. In addition, more people live in the many small market towns than they did in previous centuries. Some of these have just 500 inhabitants living in a hundred houses clustered around one single main road or square. But dozens more are like Stratford, housing 2,000–3,000 people, with all the professional and administrative functions one associates with a proper town. In 1600 approximately 25 per cent of the population lives in a town, compared to about 12 per cent in 1380.[11] This is an important development: if one in four people grows up in a town, then English culture is becoming increasingly urban. Society as a whole is less closely tied to the countryside. The self-reliant townsman, with a trade and the ambition to advance his status and living standards, is fast becoming the principal agent of social and cultural change. The system of villeinage – the old tradition of peasants being bonded individually and collectively to the lord of the manor, to be bought and sold along with the land – is hardly to be found anywhere.[12]

Like Stratford, many towns retain their medieval street layout. No fewer than 289 of them preserve their medieval walls.[13] Almost all have long lines of timber-framed houses with gables overlooking the streets, interspersed among the medieval churches and old halls. Most have areas where houses with large gardens have something of the 'urban farm' appearance: Norwich is said to have so many trees that it may be described as either 'a city in an orchard or an orchard in a city'.[14] But what will strike you is the number of buildings under construction, their skeletal timber frames open to the elements or their stone fronts surrounded by scaffolding. The old friaries and monasteries are being turned into warehouses or demolished to make way for new housing. In the summer months an English town

resembles an enormous building site, as several dozen new houses have their foundations dug and men stripped to the waist haul dirt up in buckets on pulleys from cellars, or lift heavy oak timbers up to form the joists of a house. Watch them passing up long elm boards to their fellows on the upper floors, talking with the master carpenter, measuring and cutting the frames of the windows and the shutters, and filling the gaps between the timbers with wattle or brick. Everyone is moving into a town, it seems.

Towns are not just for the benefit of the people who live in them. They are also crossroads: places where country life and urban professions, services and administrations mix, and where agreements can be given legal force. A town like Stratford might have upwards of one hundred brewers, but that does not mean the whole town is full of heavy drinkers; rather it indicates that all those who come into town from the hinterland on market days don't have to go thirsty. Similarly a town's surgeons and physicians do not simply administer to urban needs, but travel out to the parishes in the surrounding countryside, serving a population that might be several times larger than that of the town itself.[15] Look among the houses and shops of Stratford and you will see the full range of occupations that make up such a settlement: wheelwrights, carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, tailors, shoe-makers, glovers, victuallers, butchers, brewers, maltsters, vintners, mercers, lawyers, scriveners, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and drapers. Most towns like Stratford will have more than sixty recognised occupations; a large city like Norwich or Bristol may have considerably more than a hundred.

Before leaving Stratford, consider how the seasons affect the appearance of an Elizabethan town. The streets are not paved – very few towns are – so in April the showers create quagmires, especially at the crossroads where carts turn, churning up the mud. However much gravel is put down on the main approach roads, it is never enough to be of lasting benefit. In summer the mud dries to cakes of earth and then breaks up, so that the same carts and horses' hooves now kick up dust. The streets are more crowded too, for people mostly travel in summer. The numbers of country dwellers coming to market are supplemented by merchants arriving from the coastal towns with fresh fish for sale. As the season dwindles to autumn, the roads become less busy. On some days the streets will be almost empty as people in the countryside head out into the fields to gather in the harvest, taking

baskets of food to sustain them on their long working days. Late autumn sees more rain, and cattle, pigs and sheep herded into town to be sold before the feast of Martinmas (11 November) when many will be slaughtered and salted for the oncoming season. Looking down the same streets in winter, with the chill air and the smell of wood smoke everywhere, you will see fewer people out and about. The average temperature is about two degrees Celsius colder than what you are used to, with especially cold snaps in the 1570s and 1590s.[16] When snow falls, you wake to see the white blanket across the street – thinner on the edge, where less snow falls due to the overhanging eaves. Houses are decorated with evergreens around the doors. Long icicles hang down from their gutterless roofs, discouraging people from walking too closely to the walls. Carts leave wheel tracks, pressing the snow into slush and mud. Many people remain inside their houses, not even opening their shuttered, unglazed windows. The appearance of the whole town thus shifts with the seasons – to a much greater degree than a paved and glazed modern town, where most activities are conducted under cover.

The Countryside

Leaving Stratford-upon-Avon by the long stone bridge, you have a choice of two routes to London. One takes you via Banbury, the other via Oxford (turn right immediately on the far side of the bridge if you prefer the latter). The country here is flat and sparsely populated: the figure of sixty people per square mile given at the start of this chapter is hardly true of this corn-growing region. Parishes here have about thirty people per square mile, on average; but some are as sparse as seventeen.[17] Rather than houses, it is the fields that will catch your attention: massive areas of hundreds of acres, or even a thousand, each one divided into smaller units called furlongs. A furlong is divided in turn into between four and a dozen strips of land, each strip being allotted to a tenant of the manor. Between each furlong there is a narrow path of untilled soil, called a baulk, by which tenants might access their strips with a cart. The contemporary word for this sort of farmland is 'champaign country' (from the French *champ*, meaning field). The countryside is therefore a giant patchwork of furlongs, each characterised by the direction of the

strips and the type of crop that is growing. Some tenants plant wheat on a few of their strips and hardier crops – such as rye, vetches or barley – on the others. Some rotate the crops they plant: barley this year, wheat the next. Often you will see fields left fallow, or areas left to be grazed by pigs and cattle. Here and there, on the edges of the great fields, you will see small enclosures for livestock (known as 'closes' rather than fields). This open-field agriculture dominates the Midlands: Oxfordshire is almost entirely unenclosed in 1600, and no fewer than 125 of the 128 rural parishes in the adjacent county of Berkshire have open fields.[18]

England is not all tilled in this way. In fact, less than one-third is tilled at all. About 11,500,000 acres of England and Wales are under the plough (29 per cent of the total area). Almost as much – about ten million acres (26 per cent) – comprises untilled heaths, moors, mountains and marshland. You will be amazed at how much wasteland and 'wilderness' there is. In places like Westmorland this is only to be expected; being so rugged, and so near the lawless Scottish border; it is not surprising that three-quarters of that county is wild. You can say the same for the granite uplands of the south-west: Devon has at least 300,000 acres of moor and heath. But even Hampshire has 100,000 acres of unfarmed land and Berkshire 60,000 acres of waste. On top of this, there are the managed woodland and natural forests, which account for a further 10 per cent of the kingdom, and the pasture, parks, downland and commons, which collectively occupy another 30 per cent. The remaining 5 per cent is towns, houses, gardens, churchyards, orchards, roads, rivers and lakes.[19]

The reason why so much of England is used for grazing is the value of sheep. They are not just a food source; an even more important reason for farming them is the value of the wool. Many rural communities depend heavily on the wool trade for their income. Huge amounts of money are raised for the government through the imposition of customs duties on wool, woolfells and fleeces exported to Europe. In 1564–5, cloth and woollens account for 81.6 per cent (by value) of all the exports from England – amounting to some £1,100,000 – and the largest proportion of the remaining 18.4 per cent is raw wool, followed by woolfells.[20] This is why you will see so many sheep in England: more than eight million of them, twice as many as there are people.[21] Having said that, these are not quite the animals with which you are familiar: they are very small. Average weights are

gradually rising (through improvements in husbandry), from about 28lbs per sheep in 1500 to 46lbs in 1600, with the largest weighing 60lbs; but still these are tiny by comparison with modern ewes, which weigh 100–200lbs (a modern ram can weigh more than 350lbs).[22] Much the same can be said for the cattle (about 350lbs in Elizabethan times, and 1,200–1,600lbs today).

The fields, commons and rivers are the most striking features of the landscape as you travel towards the city of London. But such a journey will also bring many other agricultural practices to your attention. The area of woodland is now rapidly shrinking. One man in Durham has already started his long career felling trees – by 1629 he will have chopped down more than 30,000 oaks single-handedly.[23] As these take more than a century to grow to maturity, this is clearly unsustainable; but many landlords do not regret the permanent loss of their woods because the cleared land can be used for other agricultural purposes. The widespread felling is thus doubly drastic: being permanent, it leads to higher prices of wood, encouraging landlords to fell yet more timber. Add the increase in the population and the extra wood needed for all the extra tools, cupboards, tables, beds and chests for all the extra people, not to mention the materials needed for the building (and rebuilding) of their houses, and you can see why there is not very much wood left. On top of all this, the wars with France and Spain have led to increased demand for timber – more than 600 oak trees are needed to build a warship – further adding to the demand for wood.[24] Firewood is thus expensive and in short supply, and many people have started talking about a 'fuel famine'. The government tries to take action, passing Acts of Parliament in 1558, 1581 and 1585 to prevent wood being used for unnecessary purposes; but demand still massively outstrips supply. The price of timber effectively doubles over the course of the reign.[25]

Timber felling is not the only substantial change being wrought on the countryside. A second one is enclosure. Many landlords evict their tenants and level their homes, replacing the good arable land with fields for their sheep. Others create deer parks where there used to be villages. Some landowners even deem it necessary to have two parks adjacent to their country seat, one for red deer and one for fallow. In some respects this is an attempt to hold back the pace of change and to re-create a lost 'natural world', where men are free to

hunt their food in a wooded Elysium. In other respects, it is just a status symbol. But whether done for sheep farming or for hunting, the destruction of arable fields and villages is a profound worry to the families who are evicted. It is equally worrying to the authorities in those towns where the homeless husbandmen go begging. The gradual loss of land to the working man and his family may fairly be described as the second-greatest single cause of unrest during the reign, second only to religion. By 1600, in some counties, one in six villages that existed in 1450 has been destroyed by enclosure. As we have seen, Oxfordshire and Berkshire are still almost entirely unenclosed, but they are not the norm. Fifty-eight villages have disapperared in Warwickshire, sixty in Leicestershire.[26]

Not all of England's landscape is the same. Large open fields dominate the heart of the kingdom, from Yorkshire down to the south coast, but they are not found along the Welsh border, nor in the north-west, East Anglia or Kent, where enclosed field systems are the norm. Similarly you are unlikely to come across any large open fields anywhere further west than Braunton, in north Devon. The villages in these regions are also different. Rather than being nucleated – gathered closely around a church, as they are in open-field farming counties – the houses are more spread out, often quite isolated from the centre of the community.

Different types of corn are grown in the various regions. Oxfordshire is mainly champaign country, growing high-quality wheat. Go to Norfolk, however, and you will find more rye in the fields. In Wiltshire, wheat and barley are equally popular. Further west, barley thrives better in the wet conditions. In Lancashire and the north, oats are the most common crop. In Yorkshire three times as much rye is grown as wheat. In Kent – the garden of England – there are more orchards than anywhere else, producing the finest apples and cherries. Indeed, Kent is particularly well provisioned, for the Kentish inheritance system of *gavelkind* means that yeomen's estates are divided equally between their sons. Thus extensive farms are often broken up and turned into smaller units, and these are carefully tended by the next generation of yeomen, who are owner-occupiers and more efficient in their use of land.

Another rapidly changing area of the countryside is its perimeter – the coast. Ports have existed since Roman times, of course, but changing attitudes to the sea are observable in the way people are

now prepared to live on the coast in smaller communities. The dangers of the early Middle Ages, when any coastal community was prey to Norse and Danish marauders, or Irish and Scots pirates, are long gone. People across England have started to build much closer to the sea, and fishing villages have sprung up all round the coast. Some of these are deliberately planted by the lord of the manor. George Cary builds a stone pier at Clovelly in north Devon in this reign, emulating earlier piers such as those at Port Isaac (early sixteenth-century) and Lyme Regis (medieval). Sir Richard Grenville likewise builds a harbour at Boscastle in 1584. The opportunities provided by the sea are particularly exploited by the Cornish: they start exporting pilchards in huge quantities to Spain. They are closely followed by the people of Sussex, where fishing transforms many villages. Brighton has been home to a modest fishing community since Domesday, but now it is fast becoming a prosperous town on the strength of the industry. Despite the French burning it to the ground in 1514, it has been rebuilt and has eighty fishing vessels by 1580, catching plaice, mackerel, conger eel, cod and herring in local waters, the Channel and the North Sea.[27] Whereas in 1519 William Horman could expect his pupils to recite 'It is not good living on the sea coasts', by Elizabeth's reign more and more families are finding that quite the opposite is true.[28]

Many labourers' cottages in the countryside are still open halls, or two-room structures of a single storey. Houses made of cob are common in the rural parts of the West Country – in areas too far from the moorland granite or the red sandstone of the Exe estuary. Villages and farmsteads reflect the geological make-up of the country far more than the towns: constructed by the local community and designed with practicality in mind, they are made only of local materials. Running across the country, from the East Riding of Yorkshire down through Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire to Wiltshire and east Somerset, is a wide belt of limestone; so naturally the local farmhouses and cottages are built of that. Many houses in Cheshire, the Welsh border and the Midlands are timber-framed, due to the lack of stone. Houses in the north are predominantly built with large blocks of limestone or sandstone. In the south-east, Kent can boast more than a thousand timber-framed houses of two storeys, these being part of a gradual rebuilding that started in the late fifteenth century. Here chimneys have already become the norm, although glass

windows are still scarce. But in every region there is a social distinction. The wealthier sort, the gentlemen and the richer yeomen, are busy rebuilding their substantial houses in much the same ways as the merchants in the towns. It is the rural workers who are still living in the same conditions as their forefathers, in old single-storey, draughty, dark, small cottages.

Any village is much more than just a series of houses. There are the communal structures of the church and church house. All across the surrounding parish there are barns, byres, corn lofts, henhouses, stables, cart houses and mills. Watermills are far more common than windmills, but you will find a good many of the latter in the south-east, situated on the tops of hills. Marked out with flags on top of them, they are otherwise largely unchanged from the windmills of the late Middle Ages. They have cloth-covered sails and may be two or three storeys high; but the most remarkable thing about them is that they are built on a pivot so that the whole building can be turned to face the direction of the wind.[29] In most villages you will also come across sawpits, timber piles, dungheaps, haycocks, beehives and, of course, gardens. A statute of 1589 decrees that every new house is to be provided with four acres of land: this is the minimum thought to be appropriate for the needs of a family. All domestic buildings are positioned so as to avoid frost pockets and flooding, with further provision for the best juxtaposition of buildings. 'A hay house near a stable breedeth peril,' declares William Horman, indicating just how much thought you need to put into the location of your barns and outhouses.

However much thought goes into the planning of a village, the simple fact of people living in close proximity leads to sanitation problems. Many villages have common drains or sewers, which are regularly blocked by faeces and detritus. Walk through Ingatestone in Essex in the 1560s, for example, and you will find that people have built privies over the common gutter or sewer. In 1562 the manor court has to forbid people from leaving dead pigs, dogs and other carcases in the lanes. In 1564 a local man is ordered to remove a dunghill he has created in a public place, to cease leaving dung and the gore of slaughtered animals on the highway, and to stop doing things that block the common drain and make terrible stinking odours. That same year a general order is passed to prevent villagers building 'jakes' or privies above the common gutter, due to the stench thus created. Further orders to that

effect are made in 1565 and 1569. But do not let these incidents give you the impression that Ingatestone is a particularly noisome place; rather these entries in the manor court roll indicate that the manorial officers are particularly sensitive to the fact that their community is built alongside the main highway between London and Chelmsford, and the lord of the manor, Sir William Petre, has no wish to be associated with a village that stinks. Sir William's own house, Ingatestone Hall, has one of the most highly developed drainage systems in the country. Mind you, in Chelmsford you regularly find people urinating on the market cross; and in nearby Moulsham various people have been known to empty their chamber pots in the garden of a house known as the Friary, much to the annoyance of the inhabitants.[30]

London

London is not like any other city or town in England. As we have already noted, it is vastly more populous and geographically larger than anywhere else in the kingdom. Its social organisation is also different: it is far more cosmopolitan and its role in the government of the realm, including that of Westminster, is unique. Even at the start of the reign, when its population is about 70,000, the taxable wealth of its citizens is ten times that of the second-largest city, Norwich, which has about 10,600 inhabitants.[31] It is thus not only more populous, it is proportionally more prosperous. By 1603, when London's population has reached 200,000 people, there is simply no comparison. But forget statistics: long before you reach the city, the tangible social differences will strike you. Just look at the large numbers of people you meet on the highway. Travelling along the old Roman road known as Watling Street, you will come across messengers in their riding gear and farmers driving their animals to the city's suburbs, physicians riding out of the city to treat patients in the country, and foreign travellers in their carriages on the way to Oxford. So much wealth and variety of life are compacted into the city that in 1599 the Swiss traveller Thomas Platter declares: 'London is not in England but England is in London.'[32] Most Londoners would agree. The historian John Stow describes it in his great *Survey of London* as 'the fairest, largest, richest and best inhabited city in the world'.

All cities are places of contrast – and you will be harshly reminded of this when you get to the junction of Watling Street and the long road that is, in more recent times, Oxford Street. This point is known as Tyburn; here stand the gallows for hanging thieves. Executions normally involve several people being hanged at once. The crowds from the city come to watch the killing as if it were a great entertainment. Afterwards the naked bodies may be left turning in the breeze for a day or two. When they have gone, and the gallows are ominously empty, a haunting atmosphere remains. As the leaves of the tall elm trees that grow here rustle in the wind, you cannot help but contemplate this ancient place of death.

Turn east. In the distance you can see the city. If you make this journey on the day of Elizabeth I's accession, 17 November 1558, you will hear the church bells of all the parishes in the city and the surrounding villages ringing out across the fields. The road from here into London is more or less straight, leading from Tyburn to Newgate, about 2¾ miles away. In the distance, towering above the city, stands the immensely tall medieval spire of St Paul's Cathedral, more than 500ft high. If you stand here three years later, on 3 June 1561, you might see a bolt of lightning strike the cathedral spire and set light to the roof. The spire collapses, taking with it the bells and the lead of the roof, leaving just the tower.[33] One of the glories of the medieval cathedral builders is left like a smile with a broken tooth. The church itself is re-roofed, but the spire is never rebuilt: a visible symbol to Londoners and visitors of the uncertainty of the times.

The road along which you are travelling is bordered by fields on both sides until the crossroads with St Martin's Lane and Tottenham Court Road. Beyond this junction, behind a large copse of trees, is the church of St Giles in the Fields. Further on the road turns into a street, with about a dozen houses on each side. The next turning on the right is Drury Lane, which leads between the fields to the Aldwych and Fleet Street. If you don't take this, but keep on going straight, a moated building called Southampton House appears on your left. The road turns slightly and enters the village of Holborn. From here to the city walls the street is lined with houses on both sides. This is where several of the Inns of Court are situated – Gray's Inn, Bath Inn and Furnival's Inn on your left; Clement's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, Staple Inn, Barnard's Inn and Thavie's Inn on your right. In these places law students live and study in close proximity to Chancery

Lane. The parish church of St Andrew's Holborn is next, on the right, and facing it is the imposing medieval residence of the bishop of Ely. After that you pass the turning into Shoe Lane, cross the bridge over the Fleet River (Holborn Bridge) and find yourself in the sprawling mass of houses that have erupted from the city. Still you have not reached the city wall, although you can see it ahead: 18ft high, with the crenellated gatehouse of Newgate guarding the entrance. But you are already within the jurisdiction of the lord mayor and sheriffs of London.

Return this way at the end of the reign and you will see the city has spread even further west. Although the queen has it proclaimed in 1580 that there should be no development of the suburbs, London carries on expanding. In 1593 the government passes an Act prohibiting any new housing within three miles of the city; this too only slightly slows development. In 1602 the queen issues orders that all unauthorised developments in the suburbs are to be removed, but the spread of housing cannot be stopped: the houses on either side of the main road through St Giles and Holborn are one continuous stretch by 1603.[34] Within twenty years of Elizabeth's death, Drury Lane will have been entirely developed, with 897 houses along it.

Suppose you do not rush straight into London this way. Let us assume that, at Tyburn, you turn right along the country lane that leads south, alongside the queen's private hunting ground, called Hyde Park. This brings you down to a junction with a road to the city known by Londoners as 'the Way to Reading'. One day, in the next century, this will be Piccadilly, lined with aristocratic houses. For now, though, it is a unmade track between the fields. If you come this way on a fine day, you will see washerwomen laying out clothes, bed linen and tablecloths on the grass to dry. But it is not to see the washerwomen that you should come this way: rather it is to admire the palaces. If you turn off and follow the track that will later become Haymarket, this leads you down to the tall medieval cross at Charing Cross. From here you will see the sparkling Thames straight ahead and, along its bank to your right, the royal palaces of Whitehall and Westminster.

What will you make of the nearer palace, Whitehall? None of the buildings will be known to you; the only one standing in modern times (the Banqueting House) has not yet been built, so it will appear as an unintelligible mass of houses and roofs. It lacks all harmony or

structural unity. Although the full scale of the 23½ acres of building that will one day come to be known as 'the largest and ugliest palace in Europe' has not yet materialised, it will probably leave you with that same impression. If you walk towards the great gatehouse you will see the tiltyard on your right: a narrow enclosure with a barrier down the middle for ceremonial jousts. Next to it is the royal tennis court. On your left are the apartments and great hall of the original building, York House, which forms the nucleus of this so-called palace. Do not get me wrong: these buildings are lavish in the extreme, with great care and attention spent on their construction and no expense spared on their internal decoration. But the whole palace is just 'a heap of houses', as one French visitor later puts it.[35]

Go on under the arch of the great gatehouse and into King's Street. On your left is the queen's privy garden: a large square courtyard with formal flowerbeds. The stately-looking apartments on the far side, which overlook the river, are where she spends much of her time. Carry on, under the King's Street gatehouse, and go past all the houses of Whitehall. Ahead there is the gatehouse of the old Palace of Westminster. Here, beside the great abbey church, is the old hall of William II. That is now used by the offices of Chancery. The other buildings of the medieval royal palace that were not destroyed in the fire of 1512 have similarly been transformed into bureaucratic offices or halls of government. The great royal chapel of St Stephen is now the place where the House of Commons meets. Members of the House of Lords convene in the old Queen's Chamber. However, as Elizabeth only summons ten parliaments, and these only sit for a total of about two-and-a-half years of her forty-five-year reign, these huge rooms are normally left cold and empty. That is true of most of the royal palaces in Elizabeth's reign. If you go upriver and visit Hampton Court Palace, you will find that the walls are bare whitewashed plaster with empty wooden frames, for the tapestries are taken down when the queen is not in residence. Rather than servants scurrying about, carrying food for a feast or logs for a hearth, you will see dust blowing across the empty courtyards.

The Strand is the great street that connects Westminster and Whitehall to the city of London itself. You will see hundreds of lawyers and clerks walking along it from the city every morning and returning in the evening. But it is much more than just a street: it is where many of the most magnificent houses in London are

situated. At the Whitehall end, just north of Charing Cross, is the royal mews, where the queen's hunting falcons and her horses and carriages are kept. Beyond, backing on to the river, are Hungerford House, York Place, Durham Place, the Savoy Palace and Arundel Place – substantial mansions that are the homes of statesmen and bishops. The greatest lords have always preferred this area because it is quieter than the city itself, the air cleaner, there is plenty of space for the servants' quarters and, most of all, the houses have river access. From here the lords and their guests can simply take a barge to their destination; they do not have to travel by road or risk the attention of the mob. Most of these great houses are built round a quadrangle, with the private residential parts overlooking the large garden leading down to the river. On the north side of the Strand there are smaller gentlemen's houses. About halfway along is Cecil House, the grand London residence of Sir William Cecil (later Lord Burghley), the queen's principal secretary. The house is far enough advanced in 1561 for him to entertain Elizabeth here in person. Beyond its garden, and running behind all the houses along this north side of the Strand, are the undeveloped fields of Long Acre and Covent Garden, which previously belonged to the monks of Westminster Abbey and are now the property of the earl of Bedford. The developers will start to move into the area in the next reign, when Drury Lane has been built up.

At the heart of London is the Thames. It is a major asset to those who live here. As the alleys and lanes of the city are so dank, dark and dangerous, and the streets so congested, many people cut through between the houses to the stairs down to the river, where they hire a wherry to take them upstream or down. Upstream from London Bridge you'll find the wharf at Vintry, next to Queenhithe, with three cranes (Three Cranes Wharf) for lifting cargo that needs to be transported upriver, such as tuns of wine and timber. You will see hundreds of boats moored here of an evening. But far more important is the main port of London. This is made up of the twenty or so quays and wharves on the north bank of the river between London Bridge and the Tower of London, where deep-water ships can draw up and where cranes are able to hoist the goods ashore. Galley Quay, nearest the Tower, is a general lading place, but most of the others have designated purposes. Old Wool Quay is for wool and fells. Beare Quay is for traders coming from and going to Portugal. Sabbes Quay

is for traders of pitch, tar and soap. Gibson's Quay is for lead and tin. Somers Quay is for Flemish merchants. And so on. So many vessels are moored here that the Elizabethan writer and schoolmaster William Camden compares the wharves to wooded groves, 'shaded with masts and sails'. In 1599 Thomas Platter notes that there is one large boat nose-to-stern all the way from St Katherine's Wharf (just to the east of the Tower of London) to London Bridge: one hundred vessels in all.[36]

Although the majority of visitors to the city remark on the large numbers of swans on the Thames, you will probably be more impressed by the number of boats. These range from dung-boats to thousands of wherries and one glass boat: the royal barge. The river itself is wider and shallower than in modern times, with no high embankments. But one thing goes for all visitors: *everyone* talks about London Bridge. This magnificent ancient structure of twenty arches – more than 800ft long, 60ft feet high and almost 30ft wide – towers above the water. It is built on huge 'starlings': low flat pillars of stone, which are shaped like boats. These serve as both foundations and cutwaters; they also impede the flow of tidal water under the bridge. When the tide is going out it is impossible to row upstream. Similarly, it is dangerous to 'shoot the bridge' and risk yourself in the turbulent water when heading downstream. The starlings also act collectively as a form of weir, slowing the flow of the river, so that it sometimes freezes in very cold weather. In the winter of 1564–5 the ice is thick enough for some boys to play a football match on it. Everyone enjoys that occasion, even the queen, who leads her courtiers out on to the frozen river to shoot arrows for sport.

The impressive bulk of London Bridge is greatly enhanced by the shops and four-storey houses constructed along it. These are the homes of prosperous merchants, so the bridge has all the appearance of a fine street. Towards the north end is a gatehouse, the New Stone Gate. Six arches from the south end is the drawbridge. This originally had two purposes: one was to allow larger ships access to the river beyond the bridge; the other was the defence of the city. A second gatehouse stands just to the north of this drawbridge, emphasising the latter purpose. However, the drawbridge has not been raised for many years; nor will it ever be used again. In 1577 the dilapidated drawbridge tower is taken down and replaced by Nonsuch House: a magnificent four-storey timber-framed house