

# INTRODUCTION

The Imperial Age line is largely a collection of tools that enable you, the Game Master, to take inspiration from diverse Victorian themes and genres, from detective fiction to steampunk, and use them to craft a unique and entertaining Imperial Age campaign. This product presents the quintessential city of most Victorian and Victorian-esque fiction, London, to use as a background for such campaigns.

Because of the Imperial Age's diversity and versatility, the London presented in this work is the historical London of the Imperial Age. In order to ensure that this setting will be useful in all Imperial Age campaigns, no fantastic elements have been added. You are encouraged to personalize London as you see fit, incorporating those Imperial Age products that you've chosen to use for your campaign.

So put on your morning coat, grab your bowler and walking stick, and prepare to tour the greatest city of the Imperial Age!



**Imperial  
Age:  
London**  
by

**Scott Rhymer**

# THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

## THE HISTORY OF LONDON

The history of the city is the history of England. In many ways, the city mirrored the ebb and flow of the country – from lonely outpost on the edge of the Roman Empire in the first century to the centre of the world in the nineteenth century – the commercial, banking, and shipping cynosure, and the premier naval and colonial power of the world.

Founded in 42 AD, Londinium was located on the strategic and commercially advantageous Thames River. This position allowed the city to receive trade from the interior of the island, and provided access to the sea, and beyond that the commercial network of the Roman Empire. The road system from the city gave the rich farmlands around the Thames valley access to the markets. These foot and cart paths would remain cut into the countryside, some being railed over in the nineteenth century, others graded and paved to provide swifter travel.

The city grew steadily, becoming the administrative centre of Britannia Superior by the second century. The settlement built a forum, a governor's house, baths, and of course, fortifications. The gates through the wall the Romans built give their names to neighbourhoods now – Aldgate, Bishopgate, Aldersgate, Newgate, and Ludgate. The Romans worked to drain the marshes around Londinium and reclaim the land from the river, a precursor to the great land reclamation projects of the nineteenth century.

The Roman period of London is carved into the earth under the city. Catacombs worm their way under the city streets, home to the dead, but also the embryo of the sewers and cisterns that service the population today. Enlarged, modified, improved – the catacombs have mutated into underground railways, great bricked sewers, even a tunnel under the river from the Docks to Southwark. The old arched chambers of the Romans inform the design of the underground stations. And hidden from view, but still accessible with some work, are the old tombs of the Roman invaders.

After 410 AD, Britain was only a Roman province in name. Emperor Honorius had instructed the locals to look to their own defences, just as the Saxons had begun their campaign to conquer the island. Within a few decades, the city had become largely deserted. The Saxons were farmers who lived in small familial or tribal villages, and had little need for cities. However, the arrival of Christian missionaries in 604 saved the place from ignominy. Churches were established in the old Roman towns, including Lundenwic, as London was called. (Wic refers to a port or commercial town. This Saxon word is enshrined in place names like Sandwich or Wswich.) A bishop was assigned to the kingdom of East Saxon, and his cathedral was built in London. This was the first cathedral dedicated to St. Paul.

London ceased to be a Saxon city in the 800s. Viking raids on the countryside culminated in a raid in 842 of over three hundred ships, which sacked the town and disrupted trade throughout the island. "Danes" would use the city for their quarters in campaign to destroy Anglo-Saxon power in the area during 871-872. It would only be after a hard-fought campaign that King Alfred would recover the ruin of the place. Despite all this, London would rise again in 886, when Alfred re-established the city as a burgh – a walled city. This new city was located near the East End, with the former city – Aldwych – left to return to field.

This time London would flourish as a port town. Industry grew, in metalworking, bone working, and cloth making. Pottery from the mainland, stonework from Norway was imported in exchange for English woollen cloth and iron. Timber and stone houses grew up around and on top of the old ruins of the Roman town, like flowers from a grave. During the eleventh century rule of Edward the Confessor, much energy and money was directed to the development of a monastery to St. Peter, known as the "west minster." The royal palace was placed beside the monastery, and these buildings became the centre of governmental power in the city.

The Normans would continue to use Westminster as the administrative centre of the city. William the Conqueror continued the development of the city, which was described by contemporaries as having a great city wall with many gates. Churches and castles abounded, and there were many markets and fairs. One contemporary, William Fitz Stephen described London as "the most noble city." The city would grow and shrink in size and population over the next three four centuries, but its general parameters went unchanged. Bounded by walls and shaped by Saxon and Norman streets, the bulk of London fit in the area we now call the City, with Southwark on the other bank of the Thames, and Westminster being the two distinct settlements unto themselves.

The city was large for its time, and was surprisingly wealthy. This was due to its excellent position and the presence of merchants from Flanders and Italy. Jews were encouraged to settle, bringing capital and debt. Their presence was

marked in a street name – the Old Jewry. This money drew the other important organs of government, most notably the Treasury to the Westminster area, and this in turn drew more demand for the finer things, luxury imports and fine services and crafts.

The Black Death swept through Europe and hit the island by 1348. Within two years, the population of London, including its outlying towns was reduced somewhere in the range of 40,000. Rather than decimate the economy of London, the drastic reduction in population most likely increased personal wealth, by decreasing supply for labour and allowing skilled workers in particular to demand higher wages. Housing and was cheaper and available. England's war with France also required supplies and troops, creating possibilities for profit and advancement.

London had already had special concessions from the rulers of England. The city had their own courts, laws, and customs, and during the 12TH and 13TH Centuries, the city pressured the Crown to appoint their own sheriffs, and created its own administrative council. Citizenship in London was contingent on a civic oath and taxation. Once a citizen, a man acquired the right to trade, buy and sell property, and have the protection of the city's courts. Guilds and tradesmen controlled who could become a citizen of London.

This quasi-independence of the City and the wealth it controlled made it an important point of contention in the War of the Roses – when York and Lancastrian forces fought for control of the nation – and London usually supported the government in power at the time. With the ascension of the Tudor dynasty, London found itself the recipient of construction projects that improved the city, but also presented the monarchy in the best light.

London had experienced slow evolution that was centred in the area now known as the East End. At this time, the city was mostly constrained by the city walls, and was a series of winding streets between the Tower of London and St. Paul's Cathedral, with London Bridge connecting the city to Southwark on the other side of the Thames... Westminster was essentially a separate entity, the royal city occupying the ground from the River Tyburn to Charing Cross and the Strand. However, with the Tudor and Stewart periods, London experienced sudden rapid growth. One of the reasons for this was the Dissolution of Monasteries that occurred in 1536. These institutions were generally viewed as antediluvian and degenerate, but importantly, they held vast land grants in and about the city. Henry VIII, who was experiencing serious cash flow problems due to his extravagant lifestyle and international strife caused by his marital situation, found the monasteries a dangerous, but potentially profitable, element. Monasteries held as much as 60% of the land in certain areas. Stripping the monasteries of their land grants, Henry was able to parcel out the land to local landowners, favoured courtiers, and government officials for a massive profit. This resulted in a spurt of building and the population of London quadrupled in the period between the Dissolution and 1700 – this despite more outbreaks of the plague and the Great Fire in 1666. London's numbers reached half a million, to par with Paris, by the eighteenth century.



The Great Fire changed a lot of the character of London. Three-quarters of the buildings inside the city walls were destroyed, along with St. Paul's Cathedral. Previously, buildings were primarily wood-framed, but after the fire, buildings were constructed of brick or stone. Streets were widened to increase traffic flow and separate the buildings to prevent fire from jumping from house to house. Sir Christopher Wren designed a street plan that would have been orderly and elegant,

but the construction tended to follow the old streets and alleys of the city. However, the street frontages were built to specifications laid down by Wren, and this uniformity can be seen particularly in the streets of Bloomsbury. He also redesigned various churches throughout the city, including the current, spectacular St. Paul's.

The maritime trade of the eighteenth century brought more and more wealth in from India and the Americas. This money came through London, and landowners and the burgeoning middle-class spent much of their profits on construction and improvements in the buildings of the city. These colonial earnings funded planned neighbourhoods in the West End. In addition to Marylebone, Chelsea, and Brompton, satellite communities like Islington and Hampstead grew up on the edge of London as a place for the middle-class and gentry to find a place to live outside of the city, but easily within reach of their work.

Georgian London also saw the beginning of "Clubland" – the gentlemen's clubs that line the roads in near St. James and Mayfair. Defined by politics or purpose, the club provided a civilized home away from home for government officials and other politically active men. In addition to the political clubs like Boodles or Whites, scientific organizations like the Royal Society, or the Traveller's Club; artistic and literary clubs; or military clubs like the Army and Navy created environments that were tailored to the interests of their members and provided a sense of elitism for the members.

The old walls of the city were demolished. More bridges were built across the Thames, facilitating commuting from the communities on the southern bank, and creating a new outlet for middle-class desire to live outside of the city itself. Workers followed the new industries to Southwark and Rotherhithe, and these neighbourhoods broke down along class lines. By the middle of the century, most of the industry in the City proper revolved around breweries, newspapers, and government.

Along with the new, fine buildings came a desire to improve their environment. From the unofficial beginnings of the Bow Street Runners, the Metropolitan Police Force was created by Sir Robert Peel in 1829. Fire brigades were organized and funded by the city or the neighbourhood. New building codes required new industry to relocate outside of the city, much of it downstream on the Thames.

Always commercial in character, London solidified its image as the centre of empire with the 1851 Great Exposition at Crystal Palace. The expo gave British industry and colonial producers the opportunity to show the world the wares produced by the nation and the tout the expanse of colonial enterprise. While much of the steel and production industries of England might reside in Birmingham, the coal that drove empire was extracted in Wales, and shipping was increasing centred in Southampton and Liverpool, London remains the seat of the largest empire in the world.

## BARTHOLOMEW'S POCKET ATLAS & GUIDE TO LONDON, 1899 EDITION

The following pages contain a reprint of the 1899 Edition of the indispensable Bartholomew's Guide. This precursor of today's **London A-Z** features street-level detailed maps of the city, along with a detailed Index to streets and places of interest.

The maps are arrayed by district, numbered to match the Index. To find a location from the Index on the maps, the letters indicate a cross-reference of the letters along the border of the map, and the number is the specific map being referenced. For example -- Albion Grove, Islington is listed as Dc10. Go to Map number 10, and cross reference D and c, and you'll find the location.

The map shows London as of 1899, which should be useable for most late Victorian-era campaigns.



ARRANGEMENT OF  
INDIVIDUAL MAPS

