





Reconstructing a Tudor city

Teachers background notes to the reconstruction

Earlier origins

The image gives an impression of how the city probably looked just before the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII. However many of the buildings were first built in the Medieval period. They were later renovated and altered according to need and fashion.

Functions of the buildings

Note the entrance to the Cathedral precincts, top right. There are also 2 parish churches. Most of the buildings in the city centre were for commercial and domestic use. Several were built to serve the Tourist industry.

Local resources

Notice that the timber frame style of building was very popular. Timber was a readily available material for building the frames. Small branches and raw clay were also easy to find, to make 'wattle and daub' walls. The wattles were woven together basket fashion with clay added to both sides. Note the tile roofs. Roof tiles, glazed floor tiles and a whole range of kitchen and table pottery was made in kilns just 3 km north of the city in the Tyler Hill area (hence the name). From c.1150 to the early 20th century an extensive potting industry exploited the London clay beds found there. The closest excavated remains to the city are from the campus of Kent University and grounds of St Edmund's School.

The 2 parish churches were built with flint and other stones. Stone imported from the continent was used for Christ Church Gate (see below).

A busy city

The evidence show us that the city centre was crowded with buildings, large and small. Here are some of the more significant ones.

Christ Church Gate

This masonry gate is top right in the image, leading into the Cathedral precincts. It was built in 1517 (inscribed in Latin above the gateway). The Church was a wealthy institution and could afford to pay for it to be built with stone imported from Caen in France. Both the gate and the Cathedral itself were built using Caen stone. The Caen quarries were near to the French coast and it was relatively easy to ship the stone over to the south-eastern coast of England. Cargoes may well have been unloaded at the port at Fordwich and then taken by cart to Canterbury.

‘Mobs wreck Cathedral gate!’

The gate has seen its share of abuse over the centuries. The wooden door that you see today is not the original. It was burnt down by rampaging locals in the Christmas Day Riots of 1647. This was the time of Oliver Cromwell and Government wanted to abolish celebration of the festival. Troops were finally brought in to restore order and the mayor of the time, Avery Sabine, was imprisoned for assaulting a citizen. So while the masonry gateway is Tudor, the wooden door is 17th century.

‘Power to the . . . bank manager (?)’

Further destruction was to follow. Directly opposite the gate is the start of Mercery Lane. Follow the line of this narrow street down to where it meets the High Street. In 1805, a local dignitary, Alderman Simmons, owned a bank just beyond this intersection, around the area of the present Lloyds Bank. He was unhappy that he couldn’t see the Cathedral clock from his bank and (such as his power) he had the twin turrets of Christ Church Gate demolished! If you stand close against Lloyds Bank wall in St Margaret’s Street and look down Mercery Lane, you can see his problem ... The turrets were not restored until 1935.

The Churches of St Mary Bredman and St Andrew

Where Mercery Lane meets the High Street you can see the tower of St Andrew’s church which seriously obstructs the main route through the city. It was demolished in 1763. To the left of St Andrew’s further down the High Street stands the medieval church of St Mary Bredman. This church was rebuilt in 1822 and finally demolished in 1900.

The Bullstake

In front and just to the right of Christ Church Gate stands a 15th century market cross in the area then known as the Bullstake (now the Buttermarket). This was one of the main meat markets, its name deriving from a stake standing at its centre where unfortunate animals were tied for baiting. The theory was that this made the meat tender. It is interesting that today we would claim that such stress would have the opposite effect! Where the ancient market cross once stood, there is now a memorial to the people of Canterbury who died in World Wars I and II.

The pilgrim inns

During the 14th and 15th centuries the Church paid for the building of a number of inns to cater for the needs of the many pilgrims visiting the shrine of Thomas Becket, murdered in the Cathedral on 29th December 1170. Some might say that (though a tragic event) this was a wonderful opportunity to attract ‘tourists’ to the city and boost the local economy by providing board and lodgings and selling souvenirs in the shops. Visitors and travellers continued to use these inns in Tudor times.

The Sun Inn

This lies on the immediate right of Christ Church Gate, looking at the image. It was built by Christ Church Priory in 1437–38. It was damaged by fire in the early 19th century and the eastern end (now ‘Cornell’, the jewellers) has been largely rebuilt. Substantial parts still survive today as ‘Starbucks’ (ground floor) and ‘The Cathedral Gate Hotel’ (first floor).

The Bull Inn

Adjacent to The Sun Inn stands The Bull Inn, built in the mid-15th century. It begins in the Bullstake market place and turns the corner into Burgate street. Of the surviving remains of the Pilgrim Inns, this is probably the most visually impressive. The projecting jetties (from the French *jeter* meaning to throw out) of the upper floors were a popular architectural style. We do not know the origins but it may well have something to do with making construction easier. There is also extra space on the larger, jettied upper floors. Today this extensive property is occupied by a number of separate businesses beginning with ‘Graham Greener’ gift shop in the corner of the Buttermarket. Next to this is ‘Steamer Trading Cookshop’ which turns the corner into Burgate Street. Steamer Trading’s neighbour is ‘Cafe Cultura’ and then finally ‘Blacks’. In its time, The Bull Inn was made up of different shops and pilgrims and other visitors were accommodated above.

The Crown Inn

The Crown Inn stands on the corner of Mercery Lane where it meets the Bullstake market place. It is the relatively small building at the top left-hand corner of Mercery Lane. In 1535 a room in the inn was known as ‘Sandwych Chamber’. The vaulted cellars of the inn are now occupied by ‘Debenhams’.

The Cheker of the Hope Inn

Travelling from The Crown along Mercery Lane towards the High Street, just short of half way down on the right-hand side you meet the corner of the impressive Cheker of the Hope. This inn was built by Christ Church Priory in 1392 at a total cost of £867. 14s. 4d. The building is almost square in plan with a galleried central courtyard. Follow the line of the inn along Mercery Lane to where it turns a right angle into the High Street. Notice the stone arcading on the ground floor along the High Street frontage. This contained shops and part of it still survives. You can see it at

the Mercery Lane/High Street corner where 'Mr Simms Olde Sweet Shoppe' is currently located. Unfortunately the left-hand side of The Cheker (as you look at the image) was destroyed in a great fire in 1865. Even in recent years, a number of small fires have broken out in the timber framed roofs of properties along the High Street and Butchery Lane (extreme bottom-right of image).

National Curriculum applications, Key Stage 2

History: The Tudor World, a local area study.

Geography: Investigating changes/continuity in land use by studying the development of a local area.

English: Descriptive work, recording data, expressing ideas and opinions, developing vocabulary.

Activities with pupils

Run off some copies of the reconstruction image to use with children. If you can, combine your work with a visit to the area. It may be helpful to have a modern street plan of this area.

Here are some questions to ask and points for discussion.

Using the reconstruction

- Tell pupils this is a picture of Canterbury in the past. Is there anything familiar in it which helps them orientate themselves? (Christ Church Gate).
- Find 'Pret a Manger' cafe on the corner where Mercery Lane meets the High Street. What was outside this building in Tudor times? Is it there now? (St Andrew's church).
- How does the street pattern compare with today? (High Street, Mercery Lane, Butchery Lane on same alignment).
- Look at how many buildings there were. Talk about their functions and the jobs people would have had. What does this suggest? (Crowded, busy city with large population. Skilled craftsmen and thriving businesses).
- How were most of the buildings built? What materials were used for the churches and Cathedral?
- Look at the narrow streets (Butchery Lane, Mercery Lane). Can they think of any disadvantages here? (Fire risk in particular, any others?) Any advantages? (They may come up with some original ones!).

- Can they say what any of the buildings are used for now? (Local children will probably be familiar with shops and cafes etc.in the area).

On a site visit

(perhaps concentrate on the area of Buttermarket and Mercery Lane)

- Walk down Mercery Lane and look up. Notice how close together some of the buildings are, across the lane.
- What are buildings in the area used for now? You may want to record different functions. (Later you can talk about jobs people have).

Choose a particular building

- Look for the features of the original building work (jetties, timber frame).
- How much has the building been altered since Tudor times? (Look for any changes in style, different materials, enlarged or reduced size perhaps).
- What is the building used for now?
- Any opinions on the look of the historic building? (aesthetic appeal?).
- Look for any evidence that the building is protected by a conservation order.
- Make sketches and/or take photographs to record the building as it looks now.

(Names of property occupants were updated April 2012.)

