COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

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TOMO I

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DAVID ARREDONDO GARRIDO
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(EDS.)

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del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

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Builders and Developers in 17th-Century London

Constructores y promotores edilicios en el Londres del siglo XVII

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Abstract
Con un público potencial de terratenientes y especuladores, desde mediados del siglo XVII Londres fue testigo de la difusión de una nueva categoría de literatura dedicada expresamente a la optimización de las prácticas de promoción inmobiliaria. En lugar de tratar aspectos de composición y diseño, publicaciones como *The Purchasers Pattern* (1653) de *Henry Phillips*, o *The City and Country Purchaser and Builder* (1667) de Stephen Primatt, se dedicaron a la formalización pública de los marcos económicos de la arquitectura, como el establecimiento de los costes de construcción y la fijación de las relaciones de arrendamiento. Esta literatura también intentó codificar perfiles sociales y profesionales específicos implicados en la promoción inmobiliaria, como el agrimensor, el rentista y, especialmente, el promotor de edificios, también conocido como "constructor". Mediante el examen del contenido y la autoría de una selección de estas publicaciones, el artículo analiza el proceso de codificación de los agentes y actores que debían liderar el panorama de la construcción moderna en Londres.

With a prospective audience of landowners and speculators, from the middle of the 17th century London saw the dissemination of a new category of literature expressly dedicated to the optimisation of property development practices. Rather discussing aspects of composition and design, publications like Henry Phillips' *The Purchasers Pattern* (1653) or Stephen Primatt's *The City and Country Purchaser and Builder* (1667) were instead dedicated to the public formalisation of architecture's economic frameworks, like establishing construction costs and setting up tenancy relationships. This literature also attempted to codify specific social and professional profiles involved in property development, like the surveyor, the rentier, and especially the building developer, also known as "builder". By examining the content and authorship of a selection of these publications, the paper discusses the process of codification of the agents and actors who were supposed to lead London's modern building landscape.

Keywords
Desarrollo edilicio, Londres, siglo XVII, libros
Building development, London, 17th century, books

London Real Estate in the 17th Century

A historical analysis of the legal and political set-up of the English isle shows that it was during the 13th and 14th centuries that real property gradually turned from a matter of sustenance and status into a monetary resource for the creation of surplus through the first regulated systems of monetary rent.[1] The significance of this shift can be hardly overemphasised. Patrice Derrington considers that it "marked England's transition from the agrarian Middle Ages to the commercial European Renaissance and modern capitalism".[2] As illustrated by McRae, once reclassified as property, land could be held, developed and transferred across a newly established estate market.[3] This shift of perceptions of estate property from a qualitative and moral asset into a standardisable and marketable value can be gauged through the technical institution of land surveying as a quintessentially mathematical science.[4] Concurrent with the establishment of the surveyor as a key agent of land monetisation, the ubiquity of publications on surveying and financial arithmetic provide us with evidence of the kind of technical responsibilities deemed necessary for the financial control of land.[5]

This quantitative understanding of land not only implied the emergence of new protagonists, like the surveyor, but also a reconfiguration of existing financial relationships governing estate ownership, such as those between landlord and tenant. This new social landscape was dependent on the construction of a specific body of a practical expertise, dominated by numbers and indispensable to the successful management of property. Alongside ownership of land came ownership of its affiliated quantitative knowledge. As one progressively permeated the urban realm of London's already unique metropolitan scale, the other followed with a specific set of technical specifications which came to define the capital's revolutionary cultural, financial and building practices of real estate development. This modern culture of speculative housing investment spearheaded what Elisabeth McKellar has called "The

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[1] Derek Keene, "The Property Market in English Towns, A.D. 1100-1600", in *D'une Ville à l'autre. Structures Matérielles et Organisation de l'espace Dans Les Villes Européennes (XIIIe-XVIe Siècle). Actes Du Colloque de Rome (1er-4 Décembre 1986),* ed. by Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1989); Derek Keene, "Landlords, the Property Market and Urban Development in Medieval England", in *Power, Profit, and Urban Land: Landownership in Medieval and Early Modern Northern European Towns*, ed. by Finn-Einar Eliassen and Geir Atle Ersland (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1996), 93–119; Adrian R. Bell, Chris Brooks, and Helen Killick, "Medieval Property Investors, ca. 1300–1500", Enterprise & Society 20, n.º 3 (2019): 575–612.

[2] Patrice Derrington, *Built Up: An Historical Perspective on the Contemporary Principles and Practices of Real Estate Development* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 43.

[3] Andrew McRae, "To Know One's Own: Estate Surveying and the Representation of the Land in Early Modern England", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 56, n.º 4 (1993): 333–335.

[4] Jim A. Bennett, "Geometry and Surveying in Early-Seventeenth-Century England", *Annals of Science* 48, n.º 4 (1991): 354.

[5] Examples include Anthony Fitzherbert, *The Boke of Surveying and Improvements*, 1st ed. (London, 1523); Leonard Digges, *A Booke Named Tectonicon,* 1st ed. (London, 1556); Valentine Leigh, *The Moste Profitable and Commendable Science, of Surveying*, 1st ed. (London, 1577); Richard Witt, *Arithmeticall Questions Touching the Buying or Exchange of Annuities*, 1st ed. (London, 1613); William Webster, *Websters Tables*, 2nd ed. (London, 1629).

Birth of modern London".[6] During this time the capital, already much larger than any other city in the country, grew threefold, and it has been estimated that by the end of the century it was the most populous city in Europe, housing almost half of England (fig. 1).[7] The primary motor for this growth was an intense flow of migrants, driven to London by its unique nature as both a political and a commercial centre, which made the city an international magnet for business.[8]

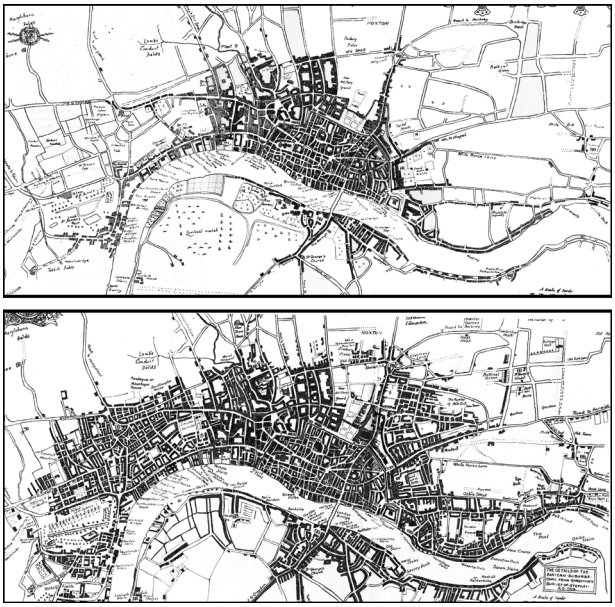

Figure 1. London in 1600 (above) and 1700 (below), Norman Brett-James. Source: *Growth of Stuart London* (London, 1933).

London quickly turned into a prime market for real estate and one of the largest rental markets in Europe, with overpopulation and dramatic mortality rates raising during much of the century. By the early 1700s three-quarters of households in the city were rented out at often record-high prices.[9] London was a frontier for the building developer, who could make significant profit by leasing, sub- leasing, building and renting even the smallest portions of land available, through stacks of often unstable building and tenancy agreements.[10] With building becoming an attractive and lucrative industry, new construction in London

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[6] Elisabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London. The Development and Design of the City 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

[7] Christopher Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500 - 1700. People, Land and Towns*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 197.

[8] Clay, *Economic Expansion*..., 187–191, 198–203.

[9] Clay, *Economic Expansion*..., 187–191.

[10] Linda Clarke, *Building Capitalism: Historical Change and the Labour Process in the Production of the Built Environment* (London: Routledge, 1991), 265.

was almost always impossible to monitor.[11] The activities of "foreign" craftsmen aggressively threatened the wearing corporative control of guilds, to the benefit of independent contractors.[12] If until the 1660s the Crown had explicitly tried to limit this troublesome and conflictual transformation, the Great Fire of 1666 evidently precipitated things, providing the city with a wide and empty territory in desperate need of rebuilding. Whereas in pre- fire London large building developments, like the lofty residential project for Coven Garden, needed extraordinary political support in order to became reality, after 1666 a liberalised building market spread across English society.[13] Professionals and even building craftsmen could take advantage of a still unprepared legislative system to turn significant profits from the building sector. Nicholas Barbon, perhaps the most well-known figure in the construction business of post-fire London, lead dozens of development schemes throughout the city, for the first time connecting real estate with other financial sectors, like insurance and banking.[14]

Whereas the existence of an active property market in the country can be traced back to the late middle ages, it was in 17th-century London that these mechanisms became structured in a large urban realm, generating a modern economic and cultural landscape of real estate development.[15] Building turned into a secure and attractive investment opportunity, spurring a wave of property mobility through various forms of both partnership and competition and fully dependent of the successful financial control of buildings.[16] Alongside the older figure of the surveyor, the building developer became the protagonist of a capitalist turn in construction. As a result, both the practical codification and cultural normalisation

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[11] M. J. Power, "East London Housing in the Seventeenth Century", in *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500- 1700,* ed. by Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London: Routledge, 1972), 237–262; Emrys Jones, "London in the Early Seventeenth Century: An Ecological Approach", *The London Journa*l 6, n.º 2 (1980): 123–34; Linda L. Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Natasha Glaisyer, T*he Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (London: Boydell Press, 2006); Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class. Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Jeremy Boulton, "Wage Labour in Seventeenth-Century London", *The Economic History Review* 49, n.º 2 (1996): 268–290.

[12] Douglas Knoop and G. P. Jones, *The London Mason in the 17th Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), 9–14; Carolyn Andervont Edie, "New Buildings, New Taxes, and Old Interests: An Urban Problem of the 1670s", *Journal of British Studies* 6, n.º 2 (1967): 35–63.

[13] See for example Derrington, *Built Up...*, 120–121; Avital Lahav, "Quantitative Reasoning and Commercial Logic in Rebuilding Plans After the Great Fire of London, 1666", *The Historical Journal* 63, n.º 5 (2020): 1107– 1131.

[14] Frank Kelsall and Timothy Walker, N*icholas Barbon: Developing London, 1667–1698* (London: The London Topographical Society, 2022).

[15] Keene, "Property Market...", 209, 216–18; Roger H. Leech, "The Prospect from Rugman's Row: The Row House in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century London", *Archaeological Journal* 153, n.º 1 (1996): 201–242.

[16] Philip Booth, "Speculative Housing and the Land Market in London 1660-1730: Four Case Studies", *Town Planning Review* 51, n.º 4 (1980): 384–386.

of real estate development turned into one of the most pressing issues for anyone involved in the construction business.[17]

The Emergence of the Building Guide

The progressive formalisation of a culture of real estate in 17th-century London was accompanied by the mediatisation of building development through the appearance of publications specifically tailored for the prospective speculator.[18] This sort of manuals, which are here called "building guides", started circulating in London from the 1650s onwards, in order to assist developers in navigating the various intricacies of building investment: from the correct survey and valuation of land, to the accurate pricing of building material and labour, to the precise calculation and application of interest rates for leases and loans, to the lawful and advantageous negotiation of building and tenancy agreements.

Building guides soon became a ubiquitous type of technical literature in 17th and early 18th-century London.[19] These publications constituted a diverse and specialised constellation of books and pamphlets which, either comprehensively or in part, were dedicated to regulating the various practices of what today we would call building management, with the key purpose of optimising property revenue.

Alongside legislative principles and general advice on property valuation, the principle of every successful building venture was the correct manipulation and accurate control of numbers (fig. 2).[20] Phillips' Purchasers Pattern, the first publication of this kind, collected practical advice, in the words of the author "to know when and how to make a good bargain either in buying or selling [property]".[21] *Willsford's Scales of Commerce* similarly includes two sections, respectively dedicated to financial mathematics and mensuration. *Primatt's City and Country Purchaser and Builder,* possibly the first to comprehensively address issues of estimation, measurement and pricing, is likewise divided into sections on financial computing and valuation, and includes a chapter on land mensuration with specific details on construction costs.

From the early stages the building guide constituted a highly structured genre, distinct from, both, earlier commercial books on mathematics, and building manuals associated to architectural design and construction. On one hand, the intention of the building guide was not properly educational. The didactic nature of earlier mathematical books was entirely bypassed by far more operative intentions, such as time saving, and especially financial

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[17] Gregorio Astengo, "A Landscape of Conflict: Speculators and Books in Early Modern London", *Ra. Revista de Arquitectura* 23 (2021): 146–161.

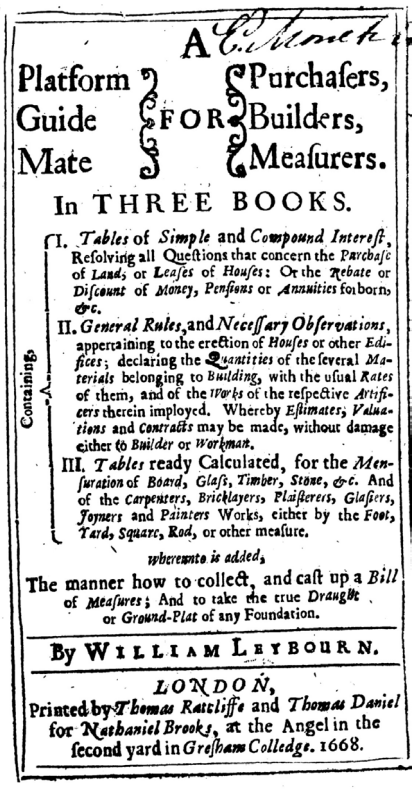
[18] William C. Baer, "The Institution of Residential Investment in Seventeenth-Century London", *Business History Review* 76, n.º 3 (2002): 516.

[19] Examples which will be discussed later include Henry Phillips, *The Purchasers Pattern*, 1st ed. (London: William Leybourn, 1653); Thomas Willsford, *The Scales of Commerce and Trade* (London, 1660); Stephen Primatt, *The City and Country Purchaser and Builder,* 1st ed. (London, 1667); William Leybourn, *A Platform for Purchasers, a Guide to Builders, a Mate for Measurers,* 1st ed. (London, 1668).

[20] Baer, "Institution of Residential Investment...", 540.

[21] Henry Phillips, *The Purchasers Pattern*, 5th ed. (London: 1667), To the Reader.

success. On the other hand, the feasibility of any construction project was a matter of quantitative valuation, numerical precision and consistency. Aspects related to composition and design, like the organisation of space, the manipulation of decorative languages and even building assembly, were almost entirely absent. For Primatt "The Art of Architecture [...] consists only in the placing of Chimneys and Stair-cases".[22]



A Platform for Purchasers, a Guide for Builders, a Mate for Measurers.

In THREE BOOKS.

Containing

I. *Tables* of *Simple* and *Compound Interest*, Resolving all Questions that concern the *Purchase* of *Land*, or *Leases* of *Houses*: Or the *Rebate* or *Discount* of *Money*, *Pensions* or *Annuities* forborn &c.

II. *General Rules*, and *Necessary Observations*, appertaining to the erection of *Houses* or other *Edifices*; declaring the *Quantities* of the several *Materials* belonging to *Building*, with the usual *Rates* of them, and of the *Works* of the respective *Artificers* therein imployed. Whereby *Estimates*, *Valuations* and *Contracts* may be made, without damage either to *Builder* or *Workman*.

III. *Tables* ready Calculated, for the *Mensuration* of *Board*, *Glass*, *Timber*, *Stone*, &c. And of the *Carpenters*, *Bricklayers*, *Plaisterers*, *Glaziers*, *Joyners* and *Painters* Works, either by the *Foot*, *Yard*, *Square*, *Rod*, or other measure.

wherewnto is added,

The manner how to collect, and cast up a *Bill* of *Measures*; And to take the true *Draught* or *Ground-Plat* of any Foundation.

By WILLIAM LEYBOURN.

LONDON,
Printed by *Thomas Ratcliffe* and *Thomas Daniel* for *Nathaniel Brooks*, at the Angel in the second yard in *Gresham Colledge*. 1668.

Figure 2. Title page from William Leybourn, *A Platform for Purchasers, a Guide to Builders, a Mate for Measurers* (London, 1668).

While receptive of some significant economic changes in 17th-century London, and especially the great fire, all publications of this kind made substantial use of recurring principles and rules. As a result, whereas the emergence of this literary genre should be connected to the formation of a modern real estate market, its specific content can also be traced back to the aforementioned generation of surveying manuals and financial pattern books. For example, the second book of Phillips' *Purchasers Pattern* explicitly mentions several earlier

[22] Stephen Primatt and William Leybourn, *The City and Country Purchaser and Builder*, 2nd ed. (London, 1680), 146.

sources on practical mathematics and measuring, originally produced for the interested landowner.[23]

The production of 17th-century building guides can thus be described as the formalisation of a century-old process of property financialisaton, and its remodelling to the highly competitive and still uncodified urban context of London. As a result, the novelty of the building guide laid not only in the knowledge that it contained, but also, and perhaps especially, in the synthetic nature in which such knowledge was assembled. Far from comprehensive, this synthesisation instead had the key objective of streamlining all practices related to building into controllable matters of numerical compilation. The success of any construction project was then assessed by its potential to yield a predictable revenue. As Phillips puts it:

> Houses are [...] chiefly sleeping holes to defend them [tenants] from the injury of the weather; for which purpose many times less costly houses would serve the turn [...] so the yearly rent may bring in some considerable profit, at least to the rate of eight in the hundred.[24]

The Milieu of the Builder

The rigid codification of knowledge on building development generated the progressive definition of the agents who were to carry it out, such as the tenant, the landlord, and especially the developer. Building development was virtually open to all, and historians have illustrated how it was not only the aristocracy, but specially the middle class and even workmen who became the protagonists of this landscape.[25]

The terminology adopted by 17th-century authors is varied in this regard. Rather than the term "architect", which was uncommon anyway, "surveyor" was often adopted to indicate measuring and drawing practices.[26] For Balthazar Gerbier, the surveyor was an architect, responsible for the design phase of a project.[27] However, as illustrated above the key practices of building development had little to do with drawing or design per se and were instead defined by more comprehensive managerial roles. In a building world largely controlled by the trades, manuals and pattern books on construction and measuring were traditionally dedicated in the first place to members of said trades, especially carpenters, and written for

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[23] These included Leonard Digges, *A Booke Named Tectonicon* (London: Felix Kngston, 1647); Aaron Rathborne, *The Surveyor in Four Bookes* (London, 1616); Thomas Bedwell, *Mesolabium Architectonicum*, 1st ed. (London, 1631); Edmund Wingate, *Arithmetique Made Easie*, 1st ed. (London, 1630); William Oughtred, *The Key of the Mathematiks*, 2nd ed., 1647.

[24] Phillips, *Purchasers Pattern,* 1653..., 10–11.

[25] In this sense, Barbon's well-known case is not typical. Baer, "Institution of Residential Investment"...; McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*..., 38–56, 93–114; Booth, "Speculative Housing"....

[26] Howard Colvin, "The Practice of Architecture 1600-1840", in *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects. 1600-1840*, 4th ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 15–37.

[27] Balthazar Gerbier, *Counsel and Advice to All Builders,* 1st ed. (London: 1663), 5.

"mean capacities".[28] Even works on theory, like Richards' translation of Palladio's first book and Leeke's expensive reproductions of Vignola's engravings, were meant for a similar audience of "workmen".[29] Many of these books were composed as instructional compendiums to facilitate some form of learning or self-checking.[30] Stirrup's *Artificers Plain Scale* attempted at instructing arithmetically illiterate readers, like "carpenters or other artificers", in the geometrical principles of mensuration.[31] Neve's *Builders Dictionary* was originally written for "Gentlemen and young (and ignorant) Handycrafts-men", "beginners, and such as have not had occasion to study this art, and not for accomplished architects".[32]

However, around the mid-century, as aspects relating to the financial exchange of property started percolating into the broader practical domain of construction, the presumed readership of the building guide also appeared to be more inclusive. Leybourn's *Planometria*, precursor of his *Compleat Surveyor*, was meant for "every man who intendeth either to sell or purchase", leaving space for both craftsmen but also, more generally, building investors.[33] Surveying was itself moving from the sole interest of wealthy landowners to a more general class of undertakers, involved in various way in the business of building. For Vincent Wing, surveying was the supreme system to impart justice between conflicting interests, be it abusive landlords and "poore tenants" landowners in need to quantify their possessions, or anyone who needed to compute building materials. For that reason, his *Geodetes Practicus* was transversally "very useful for Surveyors, Architects, Engineers, Masons, Carpenters, Joyners, Brick-layers, Glasiers, Peinters etc...".[34]

This apparent broadening in the field of interest and readership for construction and surveying manuals also meant a progressive transformation of some of the profiles addressed, in answer to a wider landscape of development practices. The term "builder" appears to be of particular significance. McKellar, Stevenson and others have illustrated that already by the mid-17th century builders came to identify general contractors, managing the overall construction process and sub- contracting specific works on behalf of a client.[35] In 1667,

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[28] Maurizio Gargano, "I Manuali Di Architettura in Inghilterra, 1720-1780", *Prospettiva* 37 (1984): 58–72; David T. Yeomans, "Early Carpenters Manuals, 1592–1820", *Construction History* 2 (1986): 13–33.

[29] Andrea Palladio and Godfrey Richards, *The First Book of Architecture by Andrea Palladio*, 1st ed. (London, 1663); John Leeke and Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, *The Regular Architect* (London, 1669).

[30] Natasha Glaisyer, "Popular Didactic Literature', in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Volume One: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. by Joad Raymond, vol. 1, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 510–519.

[31] John Darling, *The Carpenters Rule Made Easie,* 1st ed. (London: Robert and William Leybourn, 1658), cover, To the Reader.

[32] Richard Neve, *The City and the Countreys Purchaser and Builder's Dictionary. Or the Compleat Builder's Guide,* 1st ed. (London, 1703), Proem; Richard Neve, *The City and the Countreys Purchaser and Builder's Dictionary. Or the Compleat Builder's Guide,* 2nd ed. (London, 1726), Advertisement.

[33] William Leybourn, *Planometria* (London: 1650), To the Reader.

[34] Vincent Wing, Geodoetes *Practicus*, 1st ed. (London: 1664), To the Reader.

[35] McKellar, *Birth of Modern London...*, 93–101; Christine Stevenson, "English Builders in Translation", in *Literature, Learning, and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Neil Kenny (British Academy, 2022), 71–94.

Leybourn dedicated his *Line of Proportion* to the attention of "All Builders, and those that shall employ them", clearly indicating members of the trades, or "Artificiers" as he specified later on, who could be hired to carry out construction projects.[36] However, we have evidence that the term builder could also designate other figures in the building industry, belonging to a higher tier and involved more exclusively in the financial and strategic aspects of building, tasks which today we would associate to developers. Primatt's tables on values would "shew how any man may value his ground, either so to build himself, or to let the same out at a Ground Rent for another to build on the same".[37]

If instances like this suggest that the term builder could ambiguously indicate either a contractor or a building owner, the case of Barbon, London's first great "speculative builder", appears to leave no doubt.[38] In his short pamphlet *Apology to the Builder*, after dismissing classical architectural theory as an over-treated exercise, Barbon recognised builders as the "Artists of this Age", and the quintessential financial "promoter[s] of [the] Welfare" of cities, countries and governments.[39] In addressing the threat of new building taxation, Barbon was defending those who, much like himself, were responsible to fund and at times oversee the production of new buildings. "The Builder", says Barbon, "provideth the place of birth for all other arts, as well as for man", and "all those trades that belong to the furnishing of an house, have their sole dependencies on the Builders".[40] Rather than the contractor as such, Barbon's builder was an investor, a promoter and a manager. Whether a carpenter, a tailor, a goldsmith or a medical doctor, it was a new set of exclusively financial and managerial practices which defined this sort of 17th-century builder as a property developer. The "Builder" of Gerbier's *Counsel and Advice* was similarly a prospective client and patron, a building "owner" who would need to become a skilled manager in order to protect an investment from the abuses of surveyors, clerks, master workmen and other stakeholders in the construction world.[41] In the same way, John Evelyn called the *Architectus Sumptuarius "a Builder,* [...] as being the person at whose Charge, and for whose benefit the *Fabrick* is erected".[42] For Phillips, it was the builder who was to make a "considerable profit" by leasing out his cheaply built "sleeping holes".[43] The recognition of builders-as-developers aligns with Baer's definition as "project instigators", "promoters and leaders who conceived and

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[36] William Leybourn, *The Line of Proportion or Numbers, Commoly Called Gunters Line, Made Easie,* 1st ed. (London: 1667), Dedication, 1.

[37] Primatt, *City and Country Purchaser...*, 36. The practice of letting out "ground rents" was a typical financial operation of developers, who would delegate both the responsibility and first wave of profits to contractors, securing their own investment. Barbon was said to have invented this method. *McKellar, Birth of Modern London...*, 57–58; Kelsall and Walker, *Nicholas Barbon...*, 34–35, 177–179.

[38] Norman G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), 324–349.

[39] Nicholas Barbon, *An Apology for the Builder*, 1st ed. (London: 1685), 2–3.

[40] Barbon, *An apology...*, 32.

[41] Gerbier, *Counsel and Advice...*, 103–105; Eileen Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 207.

[42] John Evelyn, "An Account of Architects and Architecture", in *A Parallel of the Antient Architecture with the Modern*, ed. by Roland Fréart de Chambray and John Evelyn (London, 1664), 117

[43] Phillips, *Purchasers Pattern*, 1653..., 10–11.

initiated the project, lined up land and financing and oversaw it to completion", hiring the workforce and taking on the biggest financial risks.[44]

As evidenced by Baer, the distinction between builders-as-contractors and builders-as-developers did not correspond to a distinction of role, and ambitious members of the trades could become builders in the most comprehensive sense of the word, by taking on construction projects as both investors and contractors, at the highest possible financial risk.[45] According to Campbell, around 1750 bricklayers would often "launch out into Building Projects of their own" as developers, running significant risks and frequently ending up in jail.[46] Similarly, both "Carpenters and Joiners are undertakers in building [...]; and are liable to split upon the same Rock of Building-Projects".[47] This vagueness in the vocabulary adopted to define the agents of building development is typical evidence of a constellation of "fuzzy roles" which came to dominate London's post-fire building landscape. Socially distinct individuals could become involved in large construction projects as either developers coming from outside the trades, like Barbon, Thomas Neale or Robert Baker, tradesmen contractors, like Richard Frith or John Foltrop, or both, like Thomas Fitch or Isaac Symball.[48] Most of all, what the semantic ambiguity of the builder suggests is that around the mid-17th century, when both contractors and developers became progressively established as the protagonists of the building world, the builder acquired a distinct authorial dimension, and could indicate anyone who was deemed both financially capable and administratively responsible to carry out the construction of a building.[49] For Primatt, the responsibility for a successful rebuilding after the fire was placed in the hands of these "Ingenious Undertakers", who often acted against the interests of surveyors and contractors, ready to take advantage of their good faith and lack of experience.[50]

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[44] William C. Baer, "The House-Building Sector of London's Economy, 1550–1650", *Urban History* 39, n.º 3 (2012): 426–427. Recognising that the linguistic ambiguity surrounding the builder did not cease in the mid- eighteenth century, Lucey similarly adopted the term "house builder" to identify "any person involved in the business of property development – as building undertakers generally, and not necessarily building tradesmen by training or profession". Conor Lucey, *Building Reputations. Architecture and the Artisan, 1750-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 11.

[45] Baer, "The House-Building Sector"..., 427.

[46] Richard Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 1st ed. (London, 1747), 159–160.

[47] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*..., 161.

[48] McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*..., 46–52, 97–103; Stevenson, "English Builders...". Stevenson imagined that Evelyn's definition of the developer may have been *Architectus Pecuniarium*.

[49] This fluidity was relatively short-lived, and by the mid-1700s most publications dedicated to builders were in fact addressing almost exclusively members of the trades, who could become arbiters of both architectural taste and successful development practices. Works by William Halfpenny, William Pain, Batty Langley and others, with titles such as *The Builders Director, A Sure Guide to Builders*, *The Builders Jewel, The Practical Builder*, *The Builders Companion*, were all intended to provide design models and educational building instructions to young "Workmen' and members of the building trades. At this point, English architecture was fully entrenched in the laws of the market, and building production was determined by the operative skills of contracting firms, acting between design and construction as "administrators of form'. Lucey, *Building Reputations*...; Gargano, "Manuali...", 61.

[50] Primatt, *City and Country Purchaser*..., To the Reader.

If the builder-as-contractor was becoming one of the protagonists of the construction site, facing surveyors, clecks and workmen during land acquisition and building, the interests of the builder-as- developer stretched far beyond these initial phases of a project. In fact, the monetisation of property development was possible only once construction was completed, and a building could finally become an asset. The profit of any investor in the business of building was then tied to successfully entering a finished product into the real estate market. As a result, the building guide was meant to operate as an arbiter between the diverging interests of those involved in the development business. Phillips' book was meant to help its readers to avoid "not only deceiv[ing] others, but in many times their selves".[51] Trust was the key to all successful business operations, and the knowledge contained in the building guide was meant to protect inexperienced and prospective developers in dealing with other people.

In fact, the builder was only one of a constellation of other figures. Leybourn provides one of the most inclusive frameworks for his book, which was open to virtually everyone involved in the business of building: "Buyers and Sellers, Landlords and Tenants, Lessors and Lessees, Builders and Workmen in their respective concernments".[52] The dialectic relationship between the actors involved further emphasises the use of this book as a mediator between diverging interests, also suggesting the significant permeability and mobility of these roles. Leybourn's list of characters is notable also for the absence of the architect, the surveyor, or in general anyone traditionally responsible for the design and layout of a building. In fact, aside from a few exceptions, like Gerbier (who was known as an architect himself), architects were never expected to partake in the networked world of building development. Instead, developers were instructed to relate directly with master workmen and craftsmen, whose skills would traditionally include the control of plans and, when needed, the manipulation of basic decorative vocabulary.[53] In some cases, building guides even provided schematic ready-made plans to accompany cost computation (fig. 3).

In addition to qualifying the knowledge necessary to carry out building development projects, the dispositions proposed by many of these books were also solutions to a lack of legislative and professional clarity. Gerbier attempted to delineate a clear and straightforward system of tasks and duties during distinct phases of design and construction. Whereas in many ways distant from the realities of 17th-century London, Gerbier's indications are evidence of a will to formalise professional relationships and financial responsibilities in the building world. This problem became in particularly evident after the great fire. As the cost for house reparations was traditionally the responsibility of tenants, after 1666 these were often forced to pay for rebuilding the dwellings they occupied, which frequently lead to forfeits and lawsuits. In late 1666 a Fire Court was established expressly to settle these

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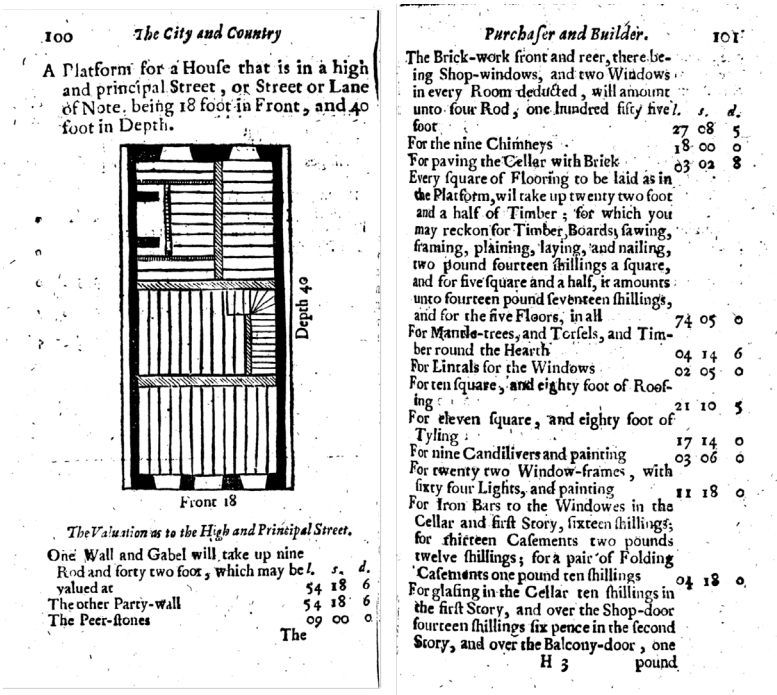
51 Phillips, *Purchasers Pattern,* 1653..., To the Reader.

52 Leybourn, *Platform*..., To the Reader.

53 Gargano, "Manuali"..., 61; John Summerson, *Georgian London*, 3 (reprint) (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 53–56; McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*..., 93–95.

"differences" in matters of property rights during the rebuilding.[54] In later editions of his book, Phillips attempted to solve this complicated problem with a compromise between the parties, who could split the costs through both direct financing and new terms for the lease.[55] The first part of Leybourn's book, dedicated to property valuation, is similarly dedicated to this problem, and set up as a fictional conversation between *Ditissimus*, the "very rich" landlord; *Inquilinus*, the tenant; and *Rationarius*, a mutual friend and neighbour who helps negotiate a satisfactory covenant.[56]



100 *The City and Country*

A Platform for a Houſe that is in a high and principal Street, or Street or Lane of Note, being 18 foot in Front, and 40 foot in Depth.

Depth 40

Front 18

The Valuation as to the High and Principal Street.

One Wall and Gabel will take up nine Rod and forty two foot, which may be valued at — *l.* 54 *s.* 18 *d.* 6

The other Party-wall — 54 18 6

The Peer-ſtones — 09 00 0

The

Purchaſer and Builder. 101

The Brick-work front and reer, there being Shop-windows, and two Windows in every Room deducted, will amount unto four Rod, one hundred fifty five foot — *l.* 27 *s.* 08 *d.* 5

For the nine Chimneys — 18 00 0

For paving the Cellar with Brick — 03 02 8

Every ſquare of Flooring to be laid as in the Platform, will take up twenty two foot and a half of Timber; for which you may reckon for Timber, Boards, ſawing, framing, plaining, laying, and nailing, two pound fourteen ſhillings a ſquare, and for five ſquare and a half, it amounts unto fourteen pound ſeventeen ſhillings, and for the five Floors, in all — 74 05 0

For Mantle-trees, and Terſels, and Timber round the Hearth — 04 14 6

For Lintals for the Windows — 02 05 0

For ten ſquare, and eighty foot of Roofing — 21 10 5

For eleven ſquare, and eighty foot of Tyling — 17 14 0

For nine Candilivers and painting — 03 06 0

For twenty two Window-frames, with ſixty four Lights, and painting — 11 18 0

For Iron Bars to the Windowes in the Cellar and firſt Story, ſixteen ſhillings; for thirteen Caſements two pounds twelve ſhillings; for a pair of Folding Caſements one pound ten ſhillings — 04 18 0

For glaſing in the Cellar ten ſhillings in the firſt Story, and over the Shop-door fourteen ſhillings ſix pence in the ſecond Story, and over the Balcony-door, one

H 3 pound

Figure 3. Pages from Stephen Primatt, *City and Country Purchaser and Builder* (London, 1667) with the calculation of the price of a 18x40ft unit.

So heartfelt was the complex nature of tenancy, that some publications were entirely dedicated to the legal aspects of property management. *The Land-Lords Law* and *The Tenants Law,* published in 1665 and 1666 respectively and possibly by the same author, attempted at "preventing differences" between the parts and mediating a successful contract without the need of the Fire Court, where lawyers, "broken tradesmen", would profit from the

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[54] Philip E. Jones, ed., *The Fire Court: Calendar to the Judgments and Decrees of the Court of Judicature Appointed to Determine Differences between Landlords and Tenants as to Rebuilding after the Great Fire,* vol. 1 (London, 1966), VI–VII.

[55] Phillips, *Purchasers Pattern*, 1667..., To the Reader.

[56] Leybourn, *Platform...*, 1–64.

litigations.[57] In establishing the necessary knowledge to navigate the complexities of renting and leasing properties the two books, whose structure and content are almost exactly the same, formalised the landlord-tenant relationship as an accepted component of the business of property development. These books ultimately underpin the emergent figure of the rentier, whose sole source of income come from owning and leasing real estate property, as a legitimate product of property monetisation.[58]

These interests were recognised as laying between both professional roles but also, and more significantly perhaps, overlapping financial concerns. If surveyors, builders, contractors and workmen were identifiable by either already established or emerging qualifications in the construction world, more open terminology such as lessors, lessees, purchasers, sellers instead pointed at transversal and fluid bundles of interests. These interests were in turn regulated and formalised by expressing them in terms of relationships between individuals. These authors were trying "to map a social order that knowable, safe and secure", and to artificially "contain" and "capture" a world in a book.[59]

The Agencies of the Building Guide

The building guide can be read as evidence of an intention to formalise property development practices, and as both the product and the sponsor of modern notions of ownership and tenancy. In what we can certainly describe as a period of political, urban, but also social and economic transition in London, these books perpetuated existing models for construction and finance in an attempt to establish them as rigid and steady paradigms. As a result, these books operated by addition, rather than adaptation, and were never updated or amended, even over a span of several decades. The last editions of Phillips' successful *Purchasers Pattern*, published in 1719 and 1721, were reprints from 1667 and 1676. According to the book then, around 1720 a 16,5 x 33 feet, four-storey terrace house cost the same 378 pounds as it did half a century earlier.[60] The building guide therefore provides us with the image of stable and straightforward system of financial exchanges, guided by clear-cut rules and secure numbers. Once confronted with the much more informal, conflictual and fluctuating reality of London's early modern construction business, the building guide generates an idealised image of London, profitable for all and free from bankruptcies, insolvencies, or grievances.[61]

At the same time, building guides also operated as an instrument for the benefit of those who made them, i.e. as marketing tools for promoting the professional services of their authors and for constructing their professional profiles. William Leybourn, a well-known surveyor hired by the London Corporation to measure the city after the Great Fire, successfully

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[57] R. T., *The Tenants Law*, 2nd ed. (London, 1670), To the Reader, 133.

[58] Derrington, *Built Up*..., 86–87.

[59] Glaisyer, *Culture of Commerce*..., 119, 129.

[60] Phillips, *Purchasers Pattern*, 1667..., To the Reader; Henry Phillips, *The Purchasers Pattern*, 6th ed. (London: E. Symon, 1719), To the Reader.

[61] McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*..., 93–114.

became one of the most prolific authors and publishers of technical literature of his time. His books never failed to include advertisements for his mathematical teaching and measuring services, as well as his own effigies, in the intellectual tradition of other early modern essayists (fig. 4).[62] Barbon, who authored numerous pamphlets to defend his activities in the eyes of Parliament, was also defending and marketing his own interests as a building developer.[63] As with the 16th-century country surveyor, 17th-century builders were presented as the key agents responsible for the financial turn of urban development.

Figure 4. Portrait of William Leybourn (1626-1716). Source: *Arithmetick. Vulgar, Decimal, Instrumental, Algebraical* (London, 1657).

The triumph of this speculative system in the following century, which includes architectural by- products like the Georgian terrace house, demonstrates the timeliness and success of its mediatisation.[64] Through the building guide, property was pictured as nothing more than an efficient mechanism for the creation of surplus value. Through the production and circulation of building guides, knowledge on building development was turned into as much of an asset as property itself, and the owners of such knowledge were in control of a modern real estate market. The innovative and idealised landscape of interactions perpetuated in these books provide us with a foundational image of London as the territory where a capitalist culture of real estate, made of private actors and their conflicting interests, could be cultivated.

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62 C. E. Kenney, "William Leybourn, 1626–1716", *The Library* 5, n.º 3 (1950): 159–171.

63 Kelsall and Walker, *Nicholas Barbon*..., 113–120.

64 Lucey, *Building Reputations*...; Gargano, "Manuali...".

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