

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.10 MARYLEBONE AND SPATIAL CLASSIFICATION

If ... I wished to make ... a foreigner clearly understand what I consider as the great defect of our [representative] system, I would conduct him through that immense city which lies to the north of Great Russell Street and Oxford Street, a city superior in size and in population to the capitals of many mighty kingdoms; and probably superior in opulence, intelligence, and general respectability, to any city in the world. I would conduct him through that interminable succession of streets and squares, all consisting of well built and well furnished houses. I would make him observe the brilliancy of the shops, and the crowd of well-appointed equipages. I would show him that magnificent circle of palaces which surrounds the Regent's Park. I would tell him that the rental of this district was far greater than that of the whole kingdom of Scotland, at the time of the Union. And then I would tell him that this was an unrepresented district.¹

This rotund specimen of the Whig reformer Thomas Babington Macaulay's finest oratory was inspired by the incongruous state of swathes of highly urbanised London which did not have their own distinctive electoral representation in the pre-1832 unwritten constitution. Such a state of affairs had developed by accident, as a result of the unplanned growth of metropolitan London. But it was one of the anomalies that prompted reformers to action.

In reality, Macaulay was exaggerating somewhat to make a valid case. The 40-shilling freeholders in these Marylebone parishes had after all been able to participate in the Middlesex elections, within which county they lay (see Table 84 in section 7.7). Nonetheless, it was incongruous that these 'opulent, intelligent, respectable' and clearly

urban parishes were not recognised as an urban interest in their own right – on a par with Westminster or the City of London, whose electoral maturity was so praised by Macaulay in 1831.²

Hence in 1832 Marylebone was constituted as a new parliamentary constituency. It was compact and densely populated, situated in the Holborn Division of Ossulston Hundred in Middlesex. (See Fig. 4)

Its boundaries extended from the open fields of Paddington in the west to the urban streets of St Pancras. The River Fleet formed the eastern boundary adjacent to the parish of St James, Clerkenwell, and the borough of Finsbury. North of St Marylebone lay Primrose Hill and Hampstead. To the south lay Westminster, divided by a boundary along Oxford Street, while south-east lay the densely populated rookeries of St Giles-in-the-Fields and the more salubrious terraces and squares of Bloomsbury.³

Environmentally, the constituency contained many broad thoroughfares and attractive squares. St Marylebone itself was dominated by the great Crown estate of Regent's Park, and by great aristocratic holdings: the Portman estate in the west of the parish, and Portland estate in the south. Meanwhile, the densely populated southern part of St Pancras was characterised by smaller landed estates. Only the Bedford estate around Bedford Square achieved a dominance comparable to that of the great estates of St Marylebone.⁴

But the constituency was not a socially homogeneous housing development for the well-to-do. In the interstices between the great squares and thoroughfares lay the less visible housing of the poor. These areas were sometimes associated with immigrant groups of low status. As a contemporary commentator reported: 'Recently at a coroner's inquest, an area near Portman Square – a very respectable part of London – was described as the abode of "a very large number of Irish demoralised by dirt and poverty".'⁵ Yet the presence of a working-class population, ranging from the respectable to the indigent, was a response to demand for labour in the vicinity. And there were also numerous middle-class shopkeepers and professional families, also providing essential services to sustain the more visible social grandees.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the new constituency had a rapidly growing population, the product of inward migration accompanied by much new building. The parish of St Marylebone grew from a population of almost 64,000 recorded in the 1801 census to nearly 140,000 by 1841. Over the same period the parish of St Pancras, in the east of the

constituency, grew from nearly 32,000 to over 128,000.⁶ But even these rapid growth rates were dwarfed by that of Paddington, in the west of the constituency. Starting from a low base population of under 2,000 in 1801, it grew to over 25,000 inhabitants forty years later.⁷ In all, the parliamentary borough was reported to have a population of 293,100 in 1841.⁸

At the same time, the number of registered electors in the constituency rose from 8,901 in 1832 to 11,799 in 1838. Much of the built up area lay in the south of the constituency: in Paddington around Bayswater; in St Marylebone to the south of the Regent's Canal and Regent's Park; and in St Pancras extending no further north than Camden Town. In administrative terms, the Marylebone parliamentary constituency was formed of three parishes,⁹ of which two were subdivided. Paddington was the unitary parish; St Marylebone had five registration districts; St Pancras had four: see listing in Table 88.

Table 88
Marylebone poll books by parish and registration district, 1837-41

Parish	Ward	1837	1838	1841
Paddington				
St Marylebone	All Souls			
	Trinity			
	Rectory			
	St Mary Christchurch			
St Pancras	East			
	West			
	North			
	South			
Total				

Note: Figures in *italic* indicate incomplete data. All figures include unpolled voters.
Source: LED.

The electoral data from the Marylebone constituency in the LED come from the period when the area was on the cusp of a yet greater transformation. This part of north London was soon to be divided, rebuilt, pulverized and energised alike by the coming of the railways in

the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Land use, employment, and market capitalisation were all affected. But in the era of the Marylebone poll books, the area retained a very urban mix of residential, retailing, services, and light industry. And the Marylebone electors quickly emerged as a distinctive force politically, joining the other metropolitan constituencies in a tradition of independence, debate, and qualified support for moderate reform.

Notes

- ¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Speech on parliamentary reform, 2 March 1831', in idem, *Miscellaneous writings and speeches* (1889), pp. 485-6.
- ² Idem, *Speeches: parliamentary and miscellaneous* (1858), i, p. 42: speech on parliamentary reform, 20 September 1831; and see section 1.10 on 'proto-democracy'.
- ³ The boundaries of the constituency are described in *BPP* (1831-2), xxxix, p. 118.
- ⁴ On the great estates, see Olsen, *Town planning in London*; and on the lesser buildings, see Clarke, *Building capitalism*; and Guillery, *The small house in eighteenth-century London*.
- ⁵ Friedrich Engels, *The condition of the working class in England* (1845; trans. and ed. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner, Oxford, 1954), p. 34.
- ⁶ For the avoidance of doubt, population figures for St Pancras relate to the whole of the parish. The initial proposal to limit its extent to the part lying south of the Regent's Canal was amended during the progress of the 1832 Reform Act through the Commons.
- ⁷ For a local history of Paddington, see T.F.T Baker (ed.), *Victoria county history of Middlesex* (Oxford, 1989) xi, pp. 173-272.
- ⁸ *BPP* (1843), xxii, p. 178.
- ⁹ 2 & 3 William IV, c. 64, Schedule O, no. 23.
- ¹⁰ See J.R. Kellett, *The impact of railways on Victorian cities* (1969; 1979; 2006).