

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.6 SPATIAL CLASSIFICATION – GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Spatial analysis is the favoured technique of the political geographer, and, of necessity, of the modern political historian. In current electoral systems, the aggregation of ballot papers within each constituency prior to counting precludes analysis within constituencies. Instead, analysis is conducted between constituencies deemed to have been dominated by agriculture, industry, or mining.¹

7.6.1 Spatial classifications within the LED

Happily, the regime of open voting that existed until the advent of the secret ballot in 1872 allows much more precise analysis of voting within each constituency. Hence in practice, spatial classification is likely to be one of the most useful and generally applicable in the LED. In part this is because much of the poll book data, and all of the rate book data, are readily amenable to spatial classification using categories inherent in the data. Partly it is because where people lived bore some relationship, albeit tenuous, to their place in society. And partly it is because the location of immovable property, whether place of freehold or place of residence, gives spatial classification an inherent robustness.

Spatial classification of electoral data also taps into a thematic area of much current interest for scholars, especially historical geographers and socio-cultural historians.² In addition, architectural historians,³ historians of the built environment,⁴ and historians of parks and open spaces⁵ are similarly absorbed with the history of places. Indeed, Space, with Time, is a highly topical research theme.

Fresh possibilities, moreover, are continually emerging with new computing power. The website *Locating London's Past*,⁶ which went live in 2011, makes it possible for users to cross-match information from an abundance of datasets onto John Rocque's 1746 *Map of London*. Exercises in mapping can

then be used to answer questions already formulated by the historian – or to create visual data that will prompt new and unexpected questions⁷ – or to allow a flexible combination of both approaches.

7.6.2 Parochial and other local allegiances

Centuries of local government, particularly of poor law administration, have centered on the parish.⁸ The fundamental concept of ‘settlement’ ensured that each person had a parish from which rights might be obtained and to which duties were owed.⁹ Although parish boundaries remained illogical and haphazard until the late nineteenth century, few can have had cause to doubt the accuracy of attribution of a voter to a place of residence, in the case of elections where a residential franchise operated.

In a sense, of course, all metropolitan constituencies shared the common characteristic of being ‘metropolitan’ that distinguished them from agricultural and industrial constituencies. But differences may be discerned between metropolitan constituencies (post-1832 Tower Hamlets and Marylebone, for example), as well as within them (the parishes of St Marylebone and St Pancras within the Marylebone constituency, for example). Nonetheless, historians should not make too much of this: residential segregation between the different social classes was not so great before the nineteenth-century growth of a mass transport system and the twentieth-century decline of the resident servant.

Electoral historians have examined the nature of landlord influence in county elections, and posited the continued existence of ‘deference communities’ in post-reform county elections. To take an example, historians might wish to test the proposition that voters were a deferential group who polled at their landlord’s beck and call. It has been argued that the post-reform county electorates were one such deferential group, and by extension that the 1832 Reform Act, as amended by the Tories, was a compromise designed to preserve aristocratic hegemony in the counties.¹⁰ Extending the concept of a deferential electorate to the borough constituencies is harder, but has still been tried.¹¹

Within the metropolitan constituencies, the compact aristocratic estates of Westminster and Marylebone were not generally coterminous with any available unit of spatial analysis. One alone, the Bedford estate in Covent Garden, is amenable to simple spatial analysis. Indeed, the parish of St Paul Covent Garden may serve as a proxy for the Bedford estate in Westminster.¹² From this base, the Russell family had long been active in politics, coming

almost to the point of regarding themselves as hereditary guardians of Whiggery.¹³ In the mid-eighteenth century, Robert Butcher, steward for John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford, was especially active in canvassing the duke's tenants at the Westminster by-election of 1749, when Lord Trentham, the duke's brother-in-law, was one of the candidates.¹⁴ One active opponent, however, was Matthew Creyghton, an upholsterer, who rented a house in Bedford Street on the duke's estate. Having campaigned for Vandeput against the Russell interest, Creyghton was then given notice to quit the property.¹⁵

Dichotomising the data is a useful mechanism for testing simple propositions. Westminster's voters in 1749 may be dichotomised between those who lived in St Paul and those who did not.¹⁶ The happy circumstance that this was a by-election necessarily dichotomises the voters between those who polled for Lord Trentham and those who polled for Sir George Vandeput.

By interrogating the data in Table 83, the null hypothesis, that there was no significant relationship between living in St Paul and voting for Trentham in 1749, can be endorsed. There was no local 'spike' of Trentham votes. Bedford's tenants behaved no differently from the inhabitants of the rest of the constituency. The practice of granting long leases, and of sub-letting, gave householders some protection from direct landlord influence.

This micro-study suggests that electors were subject to more than one formative influence upon their votes. They were not simply subject to the dictates of a local landlord, no matter how socially eminent.

Table 83
Voting in St Paul, Westminster, 1749

	Trentham	Vandeput	Total
St Paul	174	167	341
Not St Paul	4,635	4,487	9,122
Total	4,809	4,654	9,463

Source: Green, 'Thesis': now updated by LED.

Spatial classifications for each of the four constituencies in the LED are given in detail in sections 7.7-10.

Notes

- ¹ For an introduction, see H.M. Pelling, *The social geography of British elections* (1967); and for a contemporary reader with an international perspective, see P.J. Taylor and R.J. Johnston, *Geography of elections* (Harmondsworth, 1979). Other studies incorporating spatial analysis of aggregate data include J.A. Turner, *British politics and the Great War: coalition and conflict, 1915-18* (1992), especially Appendix II, pp. 472-9; K.D. Wald, *Crosses on the ballot: patterns of British voter alignment since 1885* (Princeton, NJ, 1983); R.J. Johnston, C.J. Pattie, and J.G. Allsopp, *A nation dividing? The electoral map of Great Britain, 1979-87* (1988); and R. Johnston and C. Pattie, *Putting voters in their place: geography and elections in Great Britain* (Oxford, 2006). In addition, R. Johnston, C. Pattie, D. Dorling, and D. Rossiter, *From votes to seats: the operation of the UK electoral system since 1945* (Manchester, 2001) examines mismatches between voting and representation.
- ² See for examples M. Ogborn, *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies, 1680-1780* (New York, 1998); and T. Hitchcock and H. Shore (eds), *The streets of London: from the great fire to the great stink* (2003).
- ³ J. Summerson, *Georgian London* (1945; 2nd edn, Harmondsworth, 1962) remains a useful introduction to traditional architectural history. N. Pevsner, *London except the cities of London and Westminster* (Harmondsworth, 1952) and N. Pevsner, *The cities of London and Westminster* (Harmondsworth, 1957) have now been replaced by S. Bradley, A. Rowan and N. Pevsner, *London 1: The city of London* (New Haven, Ct, 2002); B. Cherry and N. Pevsner, *London 3: North West* (Harmondsworth, 1991); B. Cherry and N. Pevsner, *London 4: North* (Harmondsworth, 1998); B. Cherry, C. O'Brien and N. Pevsner, *London 5: East* (New Haven, Ct, 2005); and S. Bradley and N. Pevsner, *London 6: Westminster* (New Haven, Ct, 2003). The slow progress of the *Survey of London* is compensated for by its exceptional detail. Volumes, such as vols 29 and 31, *St James Piccadilly* (1960-63), vols 33-4, *St Anne Soho* (1966), vol. 36, *St Paul Covent Garden* (1970), and vols 39-40, *The Grosvenor estate in Mayfair* (1977-80) are of particular interest to historians of Westminster.
- ⁴ The literature on London's built environment is considerable. D. Olsen, *Town planning in London: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (New Haven, Ct, 1964; 2nd edn, 1982) is useful for the great estates of Westminster and Marylebone. E. McKellar, *The birth of modern London: the development and design of the city, 1660-1720* (Manchester, 1999) covers the early eighteenth century. Guillery, *The small house in eighteenth-century London*, is an excellent study of those small buildings of which a far smaller proportion survive than do their grand neighbours. J. Ayres, *Building the Georgian city* (New Haven, Ct, 1998) discusses London alongside Bath, Edinburgh and Dublin. L. Clarke, *Building capitalism: historical change and the labour process in the production of the built environment* (1992) is of particular relevance for the development of St Pancras parish in Marylebone.

- ⁵ T. Longstaffe-Gowan, *The London town garden, 1700-1840* (New Haven, Ct., 2004) treats more than its title suggests, including townscapes and squares, and idem, *The London Square* (New Haven, Ct., 2012).
- ⁶ See www.locatinglondon.org.
- ⁷ See also www.historyonics.blogspot.com, 13 Dec. 2011, for T. Hitchcock's observations on different ways of using Locating London's Past.
- ⁸ K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006) makes strong claims, although it is worth observing that parishes within urban areas were also subsumed into larger units, for purposes of identity and sense of community.
- ⁹ On the evolution of the poor law system, see P. Slack, *The English poor law, 1531-1782* (1990); G. Taylor, *The problem of poverty, 1660-1834* (1969); S. King *Poverty and welfare in England, 1700-1850: a regional perspective* (2000); and L.H. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: the English poor laws and the people, 1700-1948* (1998).
- ¹⁰ Moore, *Politics of deference*.
- ¹¹ Joyce, *Work, society and politics*.
- ¹² F.H.W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London, XXXVI: the parish of St Paul Covent Garden* (1970).
- ¹³ For the familial context, see G.S. Thompson, *The Russells in Bloomsbury, 1669-1771* (1940); and for the Russells in politics, see sections 6.2 and 7.10. The continuance of this identification into later generations of the family is attested in the case of the historian Conrad Russell, 5th Earl Russell (1937-2004), who took the Liberal Democrat whip. 'Meet me at my great-grandfather's statue' [Lord John Russell, the Whig prime minister] was his classic instruction to those with appointments to meet him in the House of Lords: see P. Croft, 'Conrad Sebastian Robert Russell', *Proceedings of the British Academy: Biographical Memoirs of Fellows V*, 138 (2006), pp. 339-59.
- ¹⁴ M.C. with R.R. Battestin, 'Fielding, Bedford, and the Westminster election of 1749', p. 157.
- ¹⁵ Anon., *The two candidates, or charge and discharge* [1749], p. 19.
- ¹⁶ Voters for St Martin-le-Grand polled alongside those of St Paul at the St Paul booth. For this exercise, they have been stripped out of the St Paul voters and included with the 'others'.