

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.7 MIDDLESEX AND SPATIAL CLASSIFICATION

All Middlesex is *ugly*, notwithstanding the millions upon millions which it is continually sucking up from the rest of the kingdom. ... [T]he buildings consist generally of tax-eater's showy tea-garden-like boxes, and of shabby dwellings of labouring people, who, in this part of the country, look to be about half *Saint Giles's*: dirty, and have every appearance of drinking gin.¹

It is hard to imagine Middlesex as an agrarian county. Yet Middlesex (see Fig. 1) was for long an agricultural county by predominant land-use, if not by population. Its production was driven by the insatiable demand for fresh produce from the nearby metropolis, even while buildings of the growing conurbation were continually extending into the area.² Indeed, the urban and rural economies were intermingled. The 1841 census, for example, noted the presence of 359 hay-makers, sleeping in sheds in Harrow parish.³ But urban residents, both rich and poor, were ever encroaching. Would-be smart new housing was juxtaposed with 'shabby dwellings'. The labourers appeared as down-at-heel inner-urban gin-drinkers according to the beer-drinking William Cobbett, in the hostile commentary cited immediately above. His highly pertinent cultural reference was to Hogarth's picture of urban degeneration in *Gin Lane* (1751), satirising the all-too-urban parish of St-Giles-in-the-Fields in the Holborn district of the ancient Hundred of Ossulston, Middlesex. And, with or without the social criticism, the urbanisation of the county was indeed inexorable.

English county franchises were based not on residence, but on the ownership of landed property. The available evidence in the Middlesex poll books relating to places generally refers to the place where a

freehold lay, although some later poll books also included details of the voter's place of residence. Though there was no requirement to do so, many freeholders lived at the place where their freehold lay. Such individuals are identified in those poll books which record the name of the occupier, and where that name is the same as that of the voter. In these cases, the classification of place of freehold will serve as a proxy for place of residence. In other cases, where there is no inherent classification of place of residence, its subsequent allocation must necessarily be problematic.

Middlesex was by area England's second smallest county, after Rutland; but after Yorkshire it had in 1801 the second greatest population. Nowhere, therefore, was more urbanised or more densely populated. Even small places in Middlesex, such as Twickenham or Staines, were larger than many respectable provincial towns. Mid-nineteenth-century censuses further reveal what had long been, and long remained true: that a substantial minority of this population consisted of recent immigrants. At the same time, plenty of those who were not first generation immigrants into Middlesex were the sons and daughters of migrants who had come in earlier times. Population turnover was the norm.

For administrative purposes, the county of Middlesex⁴ was divided into six Hundreds, together with the City and Liberties of Westminster, which lay wholly within Ossulston Hundred, although they constituted a separate entity for civic purposes. The City of London likewise lay enclaved by Ossulston Hundred, but formed no part of Middlesex.

The six Hundreds varied in size, in population, and in the degree of urbanisation they experienced. By any measure the most populous and urbanised part of the county throughout the period was Ossulston Hundred, which occupied the southern and eastern part of the county, bounded on the south by the river Thames and on the east by the adjoining county of Essex. Within Ossulston Hundred the most populous and urbanised parts were those lying immediately outside the City of London: in Westminster, in the Holborn Division, the Tower Division, and the Finsbury Division.⁵

Spatial categories within the Hundreds were not consistent over time, as population growth led to the creation of new parishes throughout the period. The spatial classification shown in Table 84 is derived from the printed poll book of 1802, the last for which complete data for the county is available, together with the census of 1801. It should be noted

that this first census report made no mention of the tiny parish of St Peter ad Vincula. This church, a 'Royal Peculiar', lay within the Tower of London⁶ and was in subsequent census reports returned in the Tower Division of Middlesex. Its omission from the 1801 census was probably because of what would later be called wartime 'reasons of national security', to avoid revealing the size of the garrison within the Tower.⁷

Otherwise, the administrative patchwork of the county is shown in sequence, ordered by Hundreds and Divisions within Hundreds. The results ranged from small rural parishes like Perivale (population of 28 in 1801) to giant urbanised parishes like St Marylebone (63,982 in 1801), an area which was immediately central to the new Marylebone constituency after 1832.⁸

Table 84
Spatial distribution of Middlesex population

Hundred	Division	Parish	Population (1801)	Sub-total
Edmonton		Edmonton	5,093	
		Enfield	5,881	
		South Mimms	1,698	
		Monken Hadley	584	
		Tottenham	3,629	
				16,885
Elthorne		Old Brentford (Town)	1,443	
		Cowley (Village)	214	
		Cranford	212	
		West Drayton	515	
		Greenford	359	
		Hanwell	817	
		Harefield	951	
		Harlington	363	
		Harmondsworth	879	
		Hayes	1,026	
		Hillingdon	1,783	
		Ickenham	213	
		Northolt	336	
		Norwood	697	
		Perivale	28	
Ruislip	1,012			
Uxbridge	2,111			
				12,959

Hundred	Division	Parish	Population (1801)	Sub- total	
Gore		Edgware	412	6,968	
		Elstree			
		Harrow on the Hill	2,485		
		Harrow Weald			
		Hendon	1,955		
		Kenton			
		Kingsbury	209		
		Pinner (Hamlet)	761		
		Roxeth			
		Great Stanmore	722		
		Little Stanmore	424		
		Sudbury			
Wembley and Alperton					
Isleworth		Heston	1,782	9,266	
		Isleworth	4,346		
		Hounslow			
		Twickenham	3,138		
Ossulston	Finsbury	Old Artillery Ground (Precinct)	1,428	76,268	
		Charterhouse (Extra-parochial)	249		
		Finchley	1,503		
		Friern Barnet	432		
		Glasshouse Yard (Liberty)	1,221		
		Hornsey	2,716		
		St Mary Islington	10,212		
		St James Clerkenwell	23,396		
		St Luke Old Street	26,881		
	St Sepulchre (part)	3,768			
	Stoke Newington	1,462			
	Holborn		St Clement Danes (part)		4,144
			Duchy of Lancaster (Liberty)		474
			Ely Place (Extra-parochial)		281
			St John Hampstead		4,343
			Paddington		1,881
			Rolls Liberty (Liberty)		2,409
Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden and Ely Rents (Liberties)			7,500		
St John Baptist Savoy (Precinct)			320		
St Andrew Holborn	15,932				

Hundred	Division	Parish	Population (1801)	Sub- total
		St George Bloomsbury	7,738	
		St George the Martyr	6,273	
		St Giles in the Fields	28,764	
		St Marylebone	63,982	
		St Pancras	31,779	
				175,820
	Kensington	Acton	1,425	
		St Luke Chelsea	11,604	
		Chiswick	3,235	
		Ealing	5,035	
		Fulham	4,428	
		Hammersmith	5,600	
		Kensington	8,556	
		West Twyford (Extra-parochial)	8	
				39,891
	Tower	St Botolph Aldgate	6,153	
		Bethnal Green	22,510	
		Blackwall		
		Bow		
		St Leonard Bromley	1,684	
		Christ Church Spitalfields	15,091	
		St John Hackney	12,730	
		Holywell Street		
		Hoxton		
		Moorfields		
		Mile End New Town (Hamlet)	5,253	
		Mile End Old Town (Hamlet)	9,848	
		Norton Folgate (Liberty)	1,752	
		Old Ford		
		Poplar and Blackwall (Hamlet)	4,493	
		Ratcliff (Hamlet)	5,666	
		St Paul Shadwell	8,828	
		St Leonard Shoreditch	34,766	
		Smithfield, East		
		St Anne Limehouse	4,678	
		St Catherine (Precinct)	2,652	
		St George in the East	21,170	
		Stepney		
		St Mary Stratford at Bow	2,101	
		Tower Without (Precinct)	563	
		St John Wapping	5,889	
		St Mary Whitechapel	23,666	
				189,493

Hundred	Division	Parish	Population (1801)	Sub- total
	Westminster	Savoy (Liberty)		
		St Anne Soho	11,637	
		St Clement Danes (part)	8,717	
		St George Hanover Square	38,440	
		St James Piccadilly	34,462	
		St John the Evangelist	8,375	
		St Margaret Westminster	17,508	
		St Martin in the Fields	25,752	
		St Mary le Strand	1,704	
		St Paul Covent Garden	4,992	
		Whitehall and St James' Palaces	1,685	
				153,272
	Spelthorne	Ashford	264	
		East Bedfont	456	
		Feltham	620	
		Hampton	1,722	
		Hampton Wick (Hamlet)	793	
		Hanworth	334	
		Laleham	372	
		Littleton	147	
		Shepperton	731	
		Staines	1,750	
		Stanwell	893	
		Sunbury	1,447	
		Teddington	699	
				10,228
Total				691,050

Note: All places are parishes unless otherwise indicated. Places without population figures are taken from the Middlesex poll book of 1802. No return was made for St Peter ad Vincula, probably for what would later be known as 'reasons of national security' to avoid revealing the size of the garrison in the Tower of London.

Source: BPP (1801-2), vii, pp. 207-10.

Overall, then, it was administrative stability, notwithstanding the discrepant sizes of the different parishes, which framed the history of the Middlesex constituency and its electoral returns. The vitality of its political participation also provided a common identity, that stood comparison with that of its civic neighbours in London and Westminster.

Notes

- ¹ W. Cobbett, *Rural rides*, ed. G. Woodcock (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 31: ride from Kensington, 25 Sept. 1822.
- ² John Middleton, *A general view of the agriculture of Middlesex* (1798).
- ³ *BPP* (1843), XXII, p. 219.
- ⁴ For a traditional local history of Middlesex, see *Victoria county history of Middlesex* (12 vols, 1969-2004), the later volumes of which have much informative material.
- ⁵ On the economy of the metropolis, see L.D. Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation: entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1992); and M. Ball and D. Sutherland, *An economic history of London, 1800-1914* (2001). On poverty, see G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between social classes in Victorian society* (Oxford, 1971); D.R. Green, *From artisans to paupers: economic change and poverty in London, 1790-1830* (Aldershot, 1995); and T.V. Hitchcock, *Down and out in eighteenth-century London* (2004).
- ⁶ The church (whose building began in 1512) is a chapel royal, under the direct jurisdiction of the monarch rather than a bishop. Many but not all Royal Peculiars are associated with royal palaces or forts; and there are also a few non-royal Peculiars.
- ⁷ The Tower contained a Grand Storehouse for military equipment (built 1688-92) but was lightly garrisoned for most of the eighteenth century. Its military population increased in the wartime years after 1793; and, after the accidental burning in 1841 of the Grand Storehouse, a new Waterloo Barracks was constructed in 1845 within the walls – now used as the Jewel House.
- ⁸ See section 7.10.