

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.8 LONDON AND SPATIAL CLASSIFICATION

Note: Following the LEH website conventions, ‘London’ refers to the parliamentary constituency. ‘City of London’ is the spatial entity

O! [London’s] Lamps of a night! Her rich goldsmiths, print shops, toy shops, mercers, hardwaremen, pastry cooks! – St. Paul’s churchyard, the Strand! Exeter Change! – Charing Cross, with the man upon a black horse! – These are thy Gods O London – ... All the streets and pavements are pure gold, I warrant you. – At least I know an Alchemy that turns her mud into that metal – a mind that loves to be at home in Crowds...¹

‘London’ has long meant different things to different people. As Charles Lamb’s enthusiastic commentary indicated, it catered well for those who could cope with its crowds and diversity. Administrative London, the centre of national government, overlapped with the legal and legislative centres of the nation, while the West End became the seasonal playground of the well-to-do and the home of smart shops, with poor areas providing cheap labour tucked among the grandeur. Eastwards, commercial and financial London focused on the port and the City of London itself. It had a different appearance: of wharves and warehouses riverwards, and dwelling-places and nearby counting-houses. To take one literary example, Elizabeth Bennet’s uncle Gardiner was a City wholesaler, living, as Jane Austen specified, ‘by trade and within view of his own warehouses.’² But over time, the City’s business premises were increasingly supplanting residential properties within the inner city, as the march of London into Middlesex provided accommodation for the teeming masses of the metropolis. Meanwhile, the East End provided

labour and vitality, as well as poverty and ‘problems’. These were different Londons, but all part of the same vibrant metropolis.³

At the historic core of the metropolis, by the first river crossing at London Bridge, lay the ‘Square Mile’ of the municipal corporation known as the City of London. (See Fig. 2) Its ancient rights stretched back into history, long before the first recorded charter in *c.*1067; and its constitutional arrangements relied upon both written charters and customary practices.

Prior to parliamentary reform in 1832, London’s Common Hall franchise lacked a residential qualification. By the beginning of the nineteenth century somewhat fewer than half of London’s liverymen were resident in the City of London itself, although the overwhelming majority lived within the metropolitan region.⁴ After 1727 and before 1832, addresses are frequently recorded for those liverymen who polled, but their residences were not confined to Middlesex. Indeed, some of the unpolled liverymen recorded in the poll book of 1727 were living overseas.

More importantly, for the construction of the LED, the various addresses were not given any classification by parish or ward in the original poll books. For the historian to classify these addresses by ward would be arduous and, at best, imprecise. Indeed, the term ‘ward’ is problematic. Contemporaries in London used it fairly loosely to indicate a substantial area, often comprising a number of ecclesiastical parishes and civil precincts, which elected aldermen and common councilmen to govern the City. (Incidentally, Westminster and Marylebone used the term to indicate the subdivision of a parish, via which parish rates were collected.) The London liverymen cannot, therefore, be readily allocated into parishes or wards. Instead, they have been classified under their livery companies, as explained in section 7.1.11.

Meanwhile, the core components of London’s spatial classification in the LED remain its administrative units: the parishes and wards.⁵ The City of London was divided into 26 civil wards, which formed the building blocks of local government. It was by their wards that the common councilmen and aldermen, who governed the City, were elected. Each ward in turn contained one or more ecclesiastical parishes.

At their annual wardmotes, electors within each ward chose between four and 17 common councilmen to represent their interests. Each also elected an alderman, who generally served until death or incapacity intervened. Bridge Without ward was exceptional in lacking common

council representation.⁶ Instead, its seat on the aldermanic bench was a sinecure for the 'Father of the City', a senior alderman who had served the office of lord mayor. There was no requirement for the most senior alderman to accept the appointment. Rather, the office went to the most senior who wished to be co-opted.⁷

Another mild anomaly was the case of Cripplegate Within ward and Cripplegate Without ward. These constituted two wards for representation in Common Council but were represented by a single alderman in the Court of Aldermen. Meanwhile, the large and populous Farringdon ward had been divided since 1394, into Farringdon Within ward and Farringdon Without ward. The Inner Temple and Middle Temple were not wards of the City of London, but their inclusion within the post-1832 constituency had been recommended when the boundaries of the new constituency were determined.⁸

The 26 wards varied greatly in their size, their population, and their representation in Common Council. The inner-city wards tended to be smaller in area and with smaller populations than peripheral and extra-mural wards. The smallest ward, Bassishaw, was represented by four common councilmen. The largest, Farringdon Without, was represented by 16. But beyond this there was no proportionality of representation in Common Council. Bridge ward, with fewer than 400 houses in the later eighteenth century, returned 15 Common Councilmen. Meanwhile Portsoken ward, already gaining the reputation in the mid-nineteenth century of the 'Jewish ward', had nearly 1,400 houses throughout the period but returned just five.

Many wards in turn were divided into precincts, for which common councilmen and other civic officials were elected by the entire ward. From 1660 until 1736, a total of 234 common councilmen were returned by the 26 wards. In 1736, following a judicial decision that the parish of St Anne Blackfriars constituted part of the City, a further two common councilmen were allocated to Farringdon Within ward. And in 1826 the representation of Cripplegate Within ward was increased by four, taking the total number of common councilmen to 240.⁹

In terms of context, some broad trends can be identified relating to the spatial distribution of the population within these areas during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The general message is that there was a striking consistency in the distribution of houses in the eighteenth century, as shown in Table 85. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, change was becoming manifest. There was a long decline in

the housing density of the intramural parishes, as commercial premises began to replace residences. In all but three of the 26 parochial divisions, there were fewer domestic residences in 1851 than there were in 1787. It was a trend that was to continue for the next 150 years.

Meanwhile, extrapolating from these household totals to estimate the overall population remains a formidable problem. There are technical difficulties in reconciling the returns from London's ecclesiastical parishes with those for civil wards. The data are variable in quality.¹⁰ Furthermore, there is no consistent definition of what contemporaries took to constitute a household; and there were fluctuations over time in the mean number of inhabitants per household.¹¹ For general purposes, historians make best-estimates of the aggregate population. But, in the absence of reliable totals at micro-level, it is so far impossible to know whether the pre-1832 liverymen electors were evenly or disproportionately distributed in spatial terms. The contextual data in Table 85 nonetheless demonstrate the relative size and importance of the City wards in these years.

Table 85
Demographic and other features of City of London wards, 1693-1851

Ward	Houses			Common Council (1760)	Poll book records, 1847	Population 1851
	1693	1787	1851			
Aldersgate	933	1,035	912	8	450	7,343
Aldgate	1,050	1,089	635	6	551	4,460
Bassishaw	141	142	117	4	159	616
Billingsgate	392	398	242	10	322	1,077
Bishopsgate	2,004	2,038	1,481	14	886	13,866
Bread Street	335	331	254	12	288	1,272
Bridge	399	385	160	15	192	1,051
Broad Street	805	785	526	10	778	3,200
Candlewick	270	286	303	8	407	1,587
Castle Baynard	755	784	729	10	589	6,690
Cheap	369	367	317	12	438	1,722
Coleman Street	574	611	630	6	636	4,304
Cordwainer	358	367	142	8	171	816
Cornhill	222	188	277	6	408	1,366
Cripplegate Within	743	{2,690	545	8	488	3,457
Cripplegate Without	1,711		1,647	4	832	14,361
Dowgate	385	369	126	8	86	830

Ward	Houses			Common Council (1760)	Poll book records, 1847	Popula- tion 1851
	1693	1787	1851			
Farringdon Within	1,360	1,368	793	17	712	5,830
Farringdon Without	4,145	4,298	2,885	16	1,525	29,597
Langbourn	571	530		10		
Lime Street	201	209	{539	4	{978	{2,872
Portsoken	1,395	1,385	1,305	5	668	11,325
Queenhithe	470	488	373	6	275	3,547
Tower	805	782	645	12	730	3,919
Vintry	403	418	247	9	229	1,467
Walbrook	299	306	218	8	361	1,213
Total	21,095	21,649	16,048	236	13,159	127,788

Notes: Poll book records from Inner and Middle Temple are excluded. The two wards Cripplegate Within and Cripplegate Without are recorded as separate administrative units but comprised one single ward in the Court of Aldermen. The number of houses returned in 1851 includes both occupied and unoccupied houses, and those being built.

Source: C. Spence, *London in the 1690s: a social atlas* (2000), p. 176; *Oracle*, 28 August 1794; LED; *BPP* (1852-3), LXXXV.

After reform in 1832, the City of London had two kinds of voters at parliamentary elections. The first were those who were qualified to vote under the pre-reform liveryman franchise, and who continued to live within seven miles of the Guildhall. The second were the newly-enfranchised £10 householders, and it is for this group alone that there is a readily available spatial classification. Their registration was organised on the basis of the old ecclesiastical parishes. It need hardly be said that parishes, or even groups of parishes, were rarely coterminous with wards. Moreover, it is not easy to reconcile the attribution of parishes to wards shown in the electoral registers with that of divisions and parishes to wards shown in the 1835 Report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations.¹²

The poll book of 1837 contains details of those £10 householders who voted. In addition, the electoral registers of 1832 and 1848 contain details of both parish and ward of £10 householders. But this information is of limited value, since it refers to the location of the property whose occupation qualified the elector to vote. Only when the place of qualification was also the place of residence, as in around half the cases for householders voting in London in 1847, can this be used to classify

the place of residence of the voter.

The spatial classification in Table 86 is derived from the marked electoral register of 1848 (relating to the 1847 general election) showing the voting records distributed between the wards, as shown in the 1832 electoral register. It seems that the allocation of parishes to a ward was done on the basis of where the parish church lay; Lime Street ward contained no parish church, which is why it is aggregated with Langbourn ward in the parish analysis in Table 86. There was no attempt to 'equalise' constituencies in population terms. Hence small and stable intramural parishes (like St Michael Bassishaw, in Bassishaw ward)¹³ contrasted with many extramural parishes (like St Botolph Bishopgate, in Bishopgate ward),¹⁴ which were much larger and still growing.

Table 86
Spatial distribution of City of London householders, 1847

Ward	Parish	Records (1847)	Houses (1851)	Persons (1851)
Aldersgate	St Anne and St Agnes	32	58	459
	St Botolph Aldersgate	320	719	6,221
	St John Zachary	33	37	156
	St Leonard Foster Lane	42	53	305
	St Mary Staining	23	45	202
Aldgate	St Andrew Undershaft	195	174	1,181
	St James Duke's Place	66	111	827
	St Katherine Coleman	109	108	547
	St Catherine Creechurch	181	246	1,905
Bassishaw	St Michael Bassishaw	159	117	616
Billingsgate	St Andrew Hubbard	73	49	342
	St Botolph Billingsgate	48	43	341
	St George Botolph Lane	40	29	225
	St Margaret Pattens	43	28	169
	St Mary at Hill	118	93	812
Bishopsgate	St Botolph Bishopsgate	657	1,274	12,499
	St Ethelburga	55	95	693
	St Helen Bishopsgate	174	112	674
Bread Street	All Hallows Bread Street	82	69	251

Ward	Parish	Records (1847)	Houses (1851)	Persons (1851)
	St John the Evangelist	35	19	99
	St Margaret Moses	45	43	249
	St Mary le Bow	81	73	363
	St Mildred Bread Street	45	50	310
Bridge	St Benet Gracechurch Street	66	51	294
	St Leonard Eastcheap	37	31	152
	St Magnus the Martyr	39	33	300
	St Margaret New Fish Street	50	45	305
Broad Street	All Hallows on the Wall	171	243	2,070
	St Bartholomew Exchange	153	71	254
	St Benet Fink	163	79	314
	St Peter le Poor	291	133	562
Candlewick	St Clement Eastcheap	59	43	233
	St Laurence Pountney	60	72	314
	St Martin Orgar	79	70	324
	St Mary Abchurch	134	61	273
	St Michael Crooked Lane	75	57	443
Castle Baynard	St Andrew by the Wardrobe	69	83	680
	St Anne Blackfriars	172	289	3,029
	St Benet Paul's Wharf	87	86	663
	St Gregory by St Paul	200	176	1,428
	St Mary Magdalen Old Fish Street	61	95	890
Cheap	All Hallows Honey Lane	25	26	150
	St Benet Sherehog	36	28	144
	St Lawrence Jewry	175	102	526
	St Martin Pomeroy Ironmonger Lane	37	29	181
	St Mary Colechurch	48	42	225
	St Mildred the Virgin Poultry	65	56	319
	St Pancras Soper Lane	52	34	177
Coleman Street	St Margaret Lothbury	87	55	191
	St Olave Jewry	100	50	177
	St Stephen Coleman Street	449	525	3,936
Cordwainer	St Antholin	95	63	305
	St Mary Aldermary	76	79	511
Cornhill	St Christopher le Stocks	3	1	45

Ward	Parish	Records (1847)	Houses (1851)	Persons (1851)
	St Martin Outwich	74	40	174
	St Michael Cornhill	167	113	491
	St Peter Cornhill	164	123	656
Cripplegate Within	St Alban Wood Street	112	85	424
	St Alphage London Wall	77	122	919
	St Mary Magdalen Milk St	65	46	193
	St Mary the Virgin Aldermanbury	91	101	687
	St Michael Wood Street	65	52	286
	St Olave Silver Street	78	139	948
Cripplegate Without	St Giles Cripplegate	832	1,647	14,361
Dowgate	All Hallows the Great	72	100	700
	All Hallows the Less	14	26	130
Farringdon Within	St Augustine	45	39	273
	Christ Church Newgate Street	170	250	2,541
	St Faith under St Paul's	125	164	853
	St Martin Ludgate	106	146	1,246
	St Matthew Friday Street	60	31	164
	St Michael le Querne	58	40	134
	St Peter Westcheap	66	48	209
	St Vedast Foster Lane	82	75	410
Farringdon Without	St Andrew Holborn	244	540	5,965
	<i>St Bartholomew the Great</i>	168	356	3,499
	<i>St Bartholomew the Less</i>	13	8	827
	<i>St Sepulchre</i>	323	753	8,620
	<i>Bridewell Precinct</i>	46	51	530
	<i>St Bridget or St Bride</i>	319	685	6,039
	<i>St Dunstan in the West</i>	337	346	2,887
	<i>Whitefriars Precinct</i>	75	146	1,230
Langbourn and Lime St	All Hallows Lombard Street	117	88	456
	All Hallows Staining Mark Lane	148	108	512
	St Dionis Backchurch	204	119	746
	St Edmund King and Martyr	161	66	440
	St Gabriel Fenchurch Street	131	69	169
	St Mary Woolnoth	145	48	328
	St Nicholas Acons	72	41	221
Portsoken	<i>St Botolph Aldgate</i>	662	1,305	11,325

Ward	Parish	Records (1847)	Houses (1851)	Persons (1851)
	<i>St Mary Whitechapel</i>	6		
Queenhithe	Holy Trinity the Less	41	66	691
	St Mary Mounthaw	22	37	406
	St Mary Somerset	41	51	394
	St Michael Queenhithe	59	87	761
	St Nicholas Cole Abbey	38	36	379
	St Nicholas Olave	34	49	533
	St Peter by Paul's Wharf	40	47	383
Temple	Inner and Middle Temple	624		
Tower	All Hallows Barking	162	270	2,001
	St Dunstan in the East	318	201	1,025
	St Olave Hart Street	250	174	893
Vintry	St James Garlickhythe	55	100	627
	St Martin Vintry	57	62	300
	St Michael Paternoster Royal	42	36	171
	St Thomas the Apostle	75	49	369
Walbrook	St John the Baptist	58	45	249
	St Mary Bothaw	3	34	194
	St Mary Woolchurch-haw	57	18	125
	St Stephen Walbrook	148	64	312
	St Swithin London Stone	95	57	333
Total		13,783	16,048	127,788

Notes: Extra-mural parishes are shown in *italics*. The two wards Cripplegate Within and Cripplegate Without are recorded as separate administrative units but comprised one ward in the Court of Aldermen. The parish of St Mary Whitechapel, with a population in 1851 of 37,848 in 4,627 houses, was returned in the Tower Division of Middlesex. Parts of the parishes of St Mary le Bow and St Mildred Bread Street lay in Queenhithe ward; part of the parish of St Pancras Soper Lane lay in Cripplegate ward. Langbourn and Lime Street wards were discrete wards with overlapping parishes which cannot be disaggregated; no parish church lay in Lime Street ward. The Inner and Middle Temples, enumerated separately in the Census report, lay outside the City of London: their inclusion within the City electorate was made by a provision of the schedules to 2 William IV, c. 45 (1832).

Source: LED; BPP (1852-3), LXXXV.

In terms of further contextual detail, Table 86 also provides data about the number of houses and inhabitants (of whom adult males constituted approximately one quarter) in 1851. The mean number of people per house overall (12.6) is remarkably high at a time when the mean household size in Britain was closer to five.¹⁵ That divergence implies that many a large City of London house (defined as a physical entity) contained more than one co-resident household (sharing a common household budget). In addition, many wealthy City households may well have been unusually large, containing plentiful offspring and numerous live-in servants. The count of ‘house’ numbers may also have included clerks, porters and other employees, in premises which were part-commercial or industrial and part-residential. All such data need to be used with caution, since contemporary definitions of ‘house’ and ‘household’ were far from standardised. Hence any further conclusions must await a closer scrutiny of the census enumerators’ books

The general message, however, was clear enough: the London liverymen electors still lived cheek-by-jowl with substantial numbers of non-electors: not only within their neighbourhoods but also within their houses. Only gradually, as the City lost its residential population, and the separation of residential from business premises became much more commonplace, did the City’s residential densities fall. As that happened, so its electoral contests waned in intensity, although the City’s sense of independence and resistance to external remodelling showed no signs of flagging.

Notes

- ¹ Charles Lamb, Letter to Thomas Manning, 27(?) Feb. 1801, in E.W. Marris (ed.), *The letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* (Ithaca, 1975), i, p. 277.
- ² Jane Austen, *Pride and prejudice* (1813; in 1985 edn), p. 177.
- ³ For a readable account of yet another London, see V. Gatrell, *City of laughter: sex and satire in eighteenth-century London* (2006).
- ⁴ This impressionistic analysis is based on Anon., *A list of the livery of London, alphabetically arranged under their several wards, districts, and other places of residence* (London, 1802). This livery list in the IHR lacks a title page.

- ⁵ Parish boundaries are shown, albeit indistinctly, in Richard Horwood's *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1807).
- ⁶ Bridge Without ward (formed 1550) was immediately to the south of London Bridge. It covered three manors in Southwark which fell under the jurisdiction of the City until 1899. These manors had their own manorial courts, so that they were not separately represented on London's Common Council. Hence the ward of Bridge Without is not one of the 26 City wards enumerated in Table 84.
- ⁷ The co-option continued to be made until 1978, since the ward had a continuing legal existence, even after it was removed administratively from the jurisdiction of the City of London in 1899. Its status is now changed to form part of the combined ward of Bridge and Bridge Without.
- ⁸ *BPP* (1831-2), xxxix, p. 116.
- ⁹ [Corporation of London], *Wardmote book: provisions covering the proceedings at ward elections in the City of London* (1996), p. 12.
- ¹⁰ Further information about the household structure of the City without the walls is given in M.D. George, *London life in the eighteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 408.
- ¹¹ For an introduction to the extensive literature on the household in history, see P. Laslett, 'Characteristics of the western family considered over time', in idem, *Family life and illicit love in earlier generations: essays in historical sociology* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 12-49; and essays in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds), *Household and family in past time* (Cambridge, 1972).
- ¹² For a full breakdown of wards into parishes and parts of parishes, see *BPP* (1837), xxv, pp. 138-54.
- ¹³ The church of St Michael Bassishaw (dating from the twelfth century; rebuilt after the Fire in 1679) was located on Basinghall Street, immediately adjacent to the Guildhall. The parish was merged in 1892 with St Lawrence Jewry and the church itself demolished in 1900.
- ¹⁴ St Botolph Bishopsgate in Bishopsgate ward is located just outside the city wall, to the north of the old Bishopsgate, one of London's original seven gates. The area, containing what is now Liverpool Street station, lies on a major through route from London Bridge to points north and north-east of the City and was ripe for urban development in the eighteenth century.

- ¹⁵ M. Anderson, 'The social implications of demographic change', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain, 1750-1950, vol. 2: people and their environment* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 56, gives an estimate of 4.75. That figure was lower than a reported mean of 4.81 across England in the years 1750-1821 but higher than an estimated 4.4 in Britain as a whole at the census of 1911. In that context, the very high mean for the City of London in 1851 stands out as a matter for further investigation.