Lightening the darkness:
Poverty and deprivation in Bromley, Poplar, London:
changes of fortune during the ‘multi-campaign war on
pauperism’ 1889 – 1911

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Abstract

The problem of poverty in the increasingly overcrowded inner cities of England became regarded as a national crisis in the late nineteenth century. Government, social scientists and charities attempted to tackle the problem during a period the Lees terms the ‘multi-campaign war on pauperism’. The latter half of the century saw increased use of statistical analysis. This provided the impetus for shipping magnate Charles Booth to attempt to classify the poverty levels for the entire of London, to show the extent of the problem. His systematic survey produced seventeen volumes and a series of maps depicting poverty at street level for all of London.

At the end of the nineteenth century Bromley in the London Borough of Poplar was an extremely poor area. Poplar encompassed the East and West India docks and the factories and warehouses that grew up around them. The population were crowded into hastily built, poor quality housing close to the docks and factories where they were employed in poorly paid unskilled or semi-skilled work. Poverty and the need for proximity to their places of work led many families to live in overcrowded conditions. This affected their health and made them more likely to need medical assistance from the Poor Law Board. The availability of work was at the mercy of the weather and fluctuations in foreign trade markets. The precarious nature of their existence led them to turn to the Poor Law Board for assistance.

Overcrowding, requests for Poor Law assistance, and class of occupation are therefore markers of poverty. This study assesses continuity and change in these markers of poverty throughout the period from the 1891 census to the 1911 census. The study area focuses on one Poor Law district of Poplar which covers Bromley including the Limehouse Cut and the industrial areas around this commercial waterway.
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I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.
Jo Kent                        A826 Dissertation

List of Abbreviations

LMA          London Metropolitan Archives
LSE          London School of Economics and Political Science
NA           National Archives
PPLB         Poplar Poor Law Board of Guardians
Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century the slums of London’s East End extended ‘for miles in one unbroken and depressing sequence’.¹ Poplar sat in the heart of them. It bordered the Thames and included the Isle of Dogs and the East and West India Docks.² The Poor Law Board for Poplar divided the area into districts of which District Four covers Bromley including the Limehouse Cut, a shipping canal bordered by wharves. Bromley was an area with poor housing and many of the residents had irregular or ill paid work in the wharves or factories nearby.³ Englander attributes the motivation for Booth’s investigation to the ‘social crisis’ of the 1880s with its focus on the growing problems of ‘homelessness and destitution, slums and overcrowding, labouring and dangerous classes, the casual and sweated trades’.⁴ The area of this study, PPLB District Four, exhibits all of these problems and exemplifies the ‘social problem’ that was East London.⁵

District Four comprised sixty-eight streets in 1901, accommodating two thousand households and over fourteen thousand five hundred people. Booth’s initial survey of the labouring classes of the East End as detailed in Volume II of Life and Labour of the People in London drew on a sample of ten thousand people. He advised caution in extrapolating

¹ ‘Kings Visit to the London Hospital’, Tower Hamlets Independent and East End Local Advertiser, 06 August 1910, p. 5.
from those to the entire population, but asserts that it is not ‘inherently improbable’ that the societal breakdown he detailed using that sample was true for all of London’s three and a half million population.\textsuperscript{6} It is reasonable then, to use the entire populace of District Four, numbering over fourteen thousand people, to gain an impression of the lives of working people, not just within those streets, but in the East End of London, and generally in industrial inner city areas. Booth published a set of maps in 1902 which used a colour scale to represent the findings of his extensive research on the poverty levels of the inhabitants of each street.\textsuperscript{7} In order to make comparisons, the results of the study are similarly presented in map form. The maps are included within the text and repeated at a larger scale in the appendices for clarity.

\textsuperscript{6} Booth, p. 233.
Booth’s poverty map for Bromley shows a range of classes in the area, excluding only the highest class, and this also makes it a suitable area to study poverty in the East End of London. Bromley includes streets marked black, signifying the lowest class, in the parish of All Hallows, which marks the area out as one of interest when studying the lives of the poor.

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8 LSE, 'Map' (hereafter Booth map) Charles Booth’s London <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/15/-0.0145/51.5183/100/0> [accessed 10 July 2021].
The black streets in All Hallows are described by the local constable as ‘the worst in the district, worse than in almost any district in London’. The title of worst is hotly contested; the Reverend Jay built his church in Shoreditch in what he called ‘the worst court in the worst street in London’ and Peter Ackroyd claims Booth described Dorset Street in Spitalfields as the worst in London. Eileen Baillie, who grew up in Poplar, says in her memoir that the ‘dubious palm’ of the worst slum probably would have gone to Bermondsey, but Poplar was amongst the worst of them. Bromley is categorised by Booth as worse off than most areas in Poplar, and All Hallows the most deprived in Bromley, for this reason, this area is a suitable one in which to focus a study of turn of the century poverty.

The period of this study is one which covers the latter part of the period Lees describes as the ‘multi-campaign war on pauperism’: a period from 1870 to 1906 when government, social scientists and charities manned the ‘front line in the war on poverty’. Lees argues that this was triggered by publications such as Mearns’ Bitter Cry of Outcast London, which highlighted in dramatic terms the plight of the poor in London. The Pall Mall Gazette estimated in 1885 that as many as a quarter of the population of London were living in poverty. William Booth called for deeper investigation into ‘the social problem’

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9 LSE, B346, George H. Duckworth’s Notebook: Police District 11 [Poplar and Limehouse], District 12 [Bow and Bromley] and District 13 [South Hackney and Hackney], George H. Duckworth, p. 31 (1897).
that was urban poverty. Booth’s subsequent investigation caused shockwaves when he revealed that the true figure, according to his survey, was closer to a third. The nature and definition of ‘the social problem’ varied over time, as did the methods used by government, charities and religious institutions to tackle it. If their efforts made any impact, this should be evidenced in the findings of this study.

Booth linked overcrowded conditions with poverty, so one of the metrics examined in this study is levels of overcrowding. The period of this study covers the three censuses which have information about the number of rooms occupied and which are currently available: 1891, 1901 and 1911. The first chapter uses these figures and examines the changes to the levels of overcrowding throughout the period. The concerns about overcrowding and the moral dangers it presented are examined in this chapter, drawing on examples from the population. The chapter concludes with an examination of the cyclical nature of poverty as defined by Rowntree in his study of poverty in York, and how living in poor and overcrowded conditions was seen as an almost inevitable stage in a working man’s life.

The second chapter examines the level of reliance on Poor Law relief. For Bromley as a whole, the population increased over the period, but in District Four the population increased over the period, but in District Four the population

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18 Vaughan, p. 87
decreased by 5%, so it would be reasonable to expect a decrease both in overcrowding and in requests for Poor Law assistance. The Poor Law Application Books detail requests for households in this area and were used to build up a picture of changing levels of need across the period. The trend is towards greater need. The passing of the Pensions Act in 1908 appears to have alleviated the extreme poverty of those over seventy, however, these made up a tiny percentage of the population of the area so this did not negate the downward trend. As with overcrowding, the picture is one of decline, pointing to a failure to help the poor out of poverty.

The third chapter uses the occupations enumerated in the census returns to calculate the ‘class’ of each household. The classification scheme used is the same as Booth used, applied using a method set out by Armstrong and which Mills and Schürer assert should be used by any serious study of social stratification. The resulting maps clearly depict decline over the decades and an analysis of class distribution points to an increasingly casualized workforce living an ever more precarious existence. The period covered is one that is bookended by strikes, starting just after the match-workers strike which took place in Bromley in 1888 and ending at the beginning of the period called the Great Unrest.

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21 Wellcome Collection, Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Poplar, Metropolitan Borough, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p89fsacp, p. 9 (1913); 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
22 LMA, POBG, Record of applications, PPLB.
which began with Poplar dock workers in 1911.\textsuperscript{25} The poor working conditions that led to these strikes deteriorated during the period.

All of the map series generated for 1901 are strongly correlated to the Booth map for 1902, giving credence to Mills and Schürer's assertion about the methodology for classes, as well as that used for overcrowding and poor law requests. That they all show a decline speaks of a failure to tackle poverty in Bromley over the period. The research suggests, as Hennock observed in his study of poverty around the turn of the twentieth century, that the truth of poverty remained unchanged throughout the period.\textsuperscript{26}


Poor habitations: the constraints of poverty, 1891 - 1911

The causes and implications of some aspects of poor housing will be examined throughout this chapter. Booth’s investigation into poverty extended to housing because he saw the link between the environment and the standard of living.\(^1\) Poplar, according to Bédarida, was covered in row after row of shoddily built, damp, unhealthy housing.\(^2\) Poor housing was linked to physical and moral degradation, though Henry George saw it as an inevitable stage in the lives of working-class people and ‘as hopeless to quarrel as with the law of gravitation’.\(^3\) Whatever the cause of poor housing, its increase became a matter of growing concern after the middle classes ‘rediscovered poverty’ in the latter part of the nineteenth century.\(^4\)

The 1851 census was the first in which over half of the population were living in urban areas.\(^5\) This increased to over three quarters by 1891.\(^6\) This trend continued after this date and may have contributed to overcrowding in urban areas, particularly those, like Bromley where there was casual work to be found.\(^7\) Anna Davin states that Bromley was attractive due to the respectability of the newer suburban area, but Bédarida proposes that the move outward to the suburbs was more due to the force of overcrowding pushing ever outwards.

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than the particular pull of one area. This pressure on housing in Bromley was, in the eyes of contemporaries, exacerbated by a reluctance to build new housing in Poplar. The philanthropic housing efforts made in other parts of the East End did not extend to Poplar for largely economic reasons and only after the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890 did the London County Council (LCC) build any housing in Poplar, none of which were in Bromley. Slum clearances and philanthropic housing elsewhere in the East End may have pushed people into poorer areas including Bromley. Representatives from overcrowded areas including Bromley were on the Housing of the Working Classes Committee, which sought to tackle the problem toward the end of the nineteenth century. This rising concern led to efforts to gauge the extent of the problem. To this end, the census enumerators books included the number of rooms occupied from 1891 onwards.

Methodology

The census enumerators books for 1891, 1901 and 1911 show the number of rooms occupied if there are under 5, for each household. The instructions given in the 1911

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10 IHR Poplar; Material used here from Jo Kent, The Open University, A825, End of Module Assessment, part II, p.2.
census state that the kitchen should be counted as a room but nor the ‘scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, shop’. These instructions were given at length because the census forms were filled in by the householder, not an agent, so they were inevitably applied inconsistently. Nevertheless, the figures returned are reasonably consistent for all of the houses on each street. The percentage of overcrowding was calculated by dividing the number of households that were living in overcrowded conditions by the total number of households as enumerated in the census. As Booth correlated levels of overcrowding for a street to the class of the residents, it is appropriate to present the findings in the form of a map in the same way that Booth did, drawing on the same colour scheme. Booth divided the streets into parts, as one side of a street could be a different class to the other, so the same level of detail has been used for these maps.

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15 1911 Census.
Comparing the region as a whole there is a strong correlation between the Booth map and the 1901 overcrowding map. The areas with the darkest blue streets are the same on both maps, as are the noticeably better streets to the south of the map. Given that the maps are measuring different things, poverty on one hand, and overcrowding on the other, it shows a strong correlation between the two. As the maps correspond so closely, it is reasonable to assume a high level of correlation between poverty and overcrowding. The consistency of the resulting findings indicates a level of accuracy sufficient to enable comparison across the period.

**Overcrowding in All Hallows: cramped rooms in the Fenian Barracks**

Throughout the period the levels of overcrowding are at their highest in All Hallows, and particularly in the Fenian Barracks, a grid of streets to the south west of the parish. The Fenian Barracks acquired its name due to a supposedly high prevalence of Irish immigrants, as one resident explains in 1905, ‘They used to be all Irish living there, and a pretty rough lot, some of ’em — so that’s the name it’s known by, and it’s still called Fenian Barracks, though most of the Irish got cleared out after the butter factory changed hands.’ The name outlasted the migrant population, and this combined with the moniker for the nearest bridge over the Limehouse Cut, officially known as Lavender Bridge but known locally as the Stinkhouse Bridge, did little to improve the reputation of this ‘unsavoury locality’.

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18 Booth map, 1901 Census; See Appendix 3 for larger maps.
20 "Stinkhouse" or "Lavender", *Eastbourne Chronicle*, 28 August 1909, p. 5.
The level of overcrowding in the Fenian Barracks visibly increases across the three maps. The figures show that overcrowding for these streets alone rose from 38% in 1891, to 43% in 1901, then 49% in 1911. With overcrowding rates rising from over a third to almost half of the houses, the picture is clearly one of decline. The housing here, described in 1895 as ‘narrow dirty quarters’ and ‘crowded single rooms’, are still described as ‘crowded squalor’ ten years later.21

The parish of St Andrew begins the period with many streets which are not overcrowded at all, shown in pink on the 1891 map, and only a few streets of high overcrowding. By 1901 the situation is visibly worse. There is little visible change between 1901 and 1911 and the average level of overcrowding across the parish remains at 1.6 people per room. While averages give a good overall impression, they hide the detail of the inequalities. Empson Street, for example, was about average for the parish, with the levels of overcrowding just under the parish average of 1.47 people per room, and around 13% of the households overcrowded. The most overcrowded household in the parish had nine occupants in a single room. The worst street had an average of two people per room, where the least overcrowded, Church Avenue, had more than one room per person. Clearly there was quite a divide between these streets, despite them being grouped together by George Duckworth, who described them all as ‘poor and very rough’ but ‘not vicious in the same way as the Fenian Barracks’.²²

²² LSE, BOOTH/B/346, George H. Duckworth’s Notebook: Police District 11 [Poplar and Limehouse], District 12 [Bow and Bromley] and District 13 [South Hackney and Hackney], George H. Duckworth, p. 49 (1897).
This equation of poverty and roughness or brutality is something which occurs in much of the writing at the time. Wohl states that the portrayal of the poor as animalistic or savage was a common trope.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{The Seven Curses of London}, Greenwood finds it necessary to point out that not all of them were ‘callous brutes’, so common was this conception.\textsuperscript{24} Mearns associates poverty with neglect and pest infestation in \textit{The Bitter Cry of Outcast London} with the implication that the poor were careless of the presence of dirt or vermin.\textsuperscript{25} Davin refutes this view, stating that women would endlessly strive for the ‘illusory perfection’ of a house free from bugs, rats or mice.\textsuperscript{26} Vermin were certainly an issue in St Andrew. In Gurley Street, the School Board visitor notes that one of the houses is ‘infested with rats’.\textsuperscript{27} Nearby, the Poor Law relieving officer notes in the records for one household that ‘the little bedding they have is filthy and stained by vermin’.\textsuperscript{28} They also note that poverty has led the occupants to pawn their clothing, and are close to destitute, so perhaps the presence of vermin was relatively unimportant to them.

\textsuperscript{23} Wohl, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{26} Davin, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{27} LSE, BOOTH/B/13, Notebook: Poplar, Mile End Old Town. School Board Visitors, Mr Marsh (District G), Mr Thomson (District X1), Mr Foot (District Q1), p. 95 (1886).
\textsuperscript{28} LMA, POBG/144/17, Record of applications, District No. 7, PPLB, p. 5037 (1909 Nov-1910 Dec).
In one house on Empson Street the 1911 census return lists the residents as ‘Wife and me and a bird. I cannot answer how many mice and fleas’. This unusual addition to a document which they would have known was an official one could be read as an impotent protest against their conditions. Alternatively, noting that the wife was expecting a baby, it could be read as a cry of distress at their situation. Wohl opines of the poor of the past that ‘what their attitude was, specifically, to their homes, is something about which we can only speculate’. In this case it is apparent that that they were not insensible to their surroundings, as implied by earlier commentators who, as Lees observes, viewed the poor

as a separate, unevolved race.\(^{31}\) This is perhaps a symptom of the distancing of social commentators from their subject, as Shepherd observes, the voice of the poor was rarely captured.\(^ {32}\) Even those who rely heavily on primary oral sources, like Davin, conclude that there was ‘no room for niceties in the East End’: they may not have been careless, but a pragmatic attitude to such things as a lack of privacy would have been essential.\(^ {33}\)

The Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act 1875 states overcrowding was ‘highly injurious to the moral and physical welfare of the inhabitants’.\(^ {34}\) The Member of Parliament Sydney Gedge is quoted as saying that high rents in the East End meant that ‘men and women were herded together with their children in an improper and overcrowded place, which was apt to lead to immorality’.\(^ {35}\) Webb relates that jokes about incest amongst the sweated factory labourers she worked alongside were frequent and ‘a gruesome example of the effect of debased social environment on personal character and family life’.\(^ {36}\) Davin argues that this was a perception of the link between bed-sharing and sex, which was not necessarily shared by people living in close quarters, for whom it meant warmth and companionship.\(^ {37}\) One of the most crowded houses in the parish in 1891, was inhabited by Joseph Folkes, a widower, and his four children, and a widow, Mary Denton, a widow, acting as their housekeeper, and her two sons, all within a single room.\(^ {38}\) Initially, this could be viewed as an enumeration error as they appear to be two households, but further investigation shows that they are all one household. In the


\(^{33}\) Davin p. 56.

\(^{34}\) The Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act 1875 (38 Vict cap 126).

\(^{35}\) 'East London Church Fund', *Holloway Press*, 17 November 1899, p. 5.


\(^{37}\) Davin, p. 56.

\(^{38}\) 1891 Census.
following census return Mary Denton is listed as the head of the household with Joseph Folkes as her lodger. By 1901 she had a son, Joseph, a nine-year-old, who therefore must have been conceived after she gave her marital status as widowed. The 1911 census shows her living with one older daughter, Iris May Denton and the same son, now named as Joseph Folkes. That Joseph was the son of Mary and Joseph Folkes is stated on Joseph’s baptism record, which also gives his birth date as December of 1892. When both families entered the workhouse on the same day in 1892, the names of the children were all given as Denton (alias Folkes) or vice versa. They may have been sharing lodgings for financial reasons, but clearly there was more to their relationship than a purely pragmatic arrangement. The couple do not appear to have ever married, and Mary never gave her surname as Folkes except when entering the workhouse, presumably in order to keep the female members of the household together. While not as overcrowded as the Folkes/Denton household, in nearby Devas Street in 1901, Henry Briggs is enumerated as a single man and head of a household of three people in one room. In the same room is the single woman Mary Johnson, with the stated relation Mistress and a two-year-old child, also Mary Johnson, is enumerated as his daughter. By the time of the 1911 census, Henry and Mary claim to have been married for fourteen years, and both Marys have the

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39 1901 Census.
surname Briggs as do their other children of whom four out of seven were still living.\footnote{1911 Census: Bromley: District 27, https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/2352/images/rg14_01704_0343_03, p. 172.}

There is no evidence of any marriage certificate for the couple, so it is possible they were never married, but claimed to be for the sake of appearances. What is most notable is not the fact of illegitimacy, but the bald statement of fact that they were single and living together as married with a child, with her relationship given as mistress. This is unusual as having a child out of wedlock was certainly seen as immoral by the standards of the day. In 1977, Laslett stated that such morality was not universal, and that people such as these existed in a ‘bastardy prone sub-society’, an idea amended, but not refuted by Wrightson and Levine.\footnote{Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost: Further Explored, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 155; J. Michael Phayer, Review of Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen, and Richard M. Smith eds, Bastardy and Its Comparative History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) in Journal of Social History, 16 (1983), 172-173 (p. 173).}

While it is possible that overcrowding caused immorality according to the standard of the time, it is also possible that the reverse was true. Having children, whether in or out of wedlock, could lead to overcrowding. Certainly this would have been the case for the Beadles whose housing would have become overcrowded when their baby was born.

Such changes in fortune were identified by Rowntree as part of the cycle of poverty, which varied throughout a person’s lifetime as income and numbers of dependents varied.\footnote{Carl Chinn, Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914 (Manchester: MUP, 1995), p. 44.} This is borne out in the data for households in Bromley. The most overcrowded houses over the entire period are within St Andrew. They are populated by families with a large number of children, in once case nine children between the ages of one month and seventeen years old in one room.\footnote{1891 Census: Bromley: District 4, https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/6598/images/LNDRG12_319_321-0024, p. 7.} This family were much less overcrowded by the next census: some of
the children had left and begun families themselves, two more children had been born and two had died.\textsuperscript{48} By the time of the 1911 census, the family were living in a larger number of rooms with two unmarried working daughters of twenty and twenty-two living with their parents.\textsuperscript{49} Gauldie expands on Rowntree’s poverty cycle and household classifications, reasoning that only the top two of his class groupings had earnings high enough to be able to rent somewhere large enough to accommodate a family.\textsuperscript{50} So even if income remained level, a growing family would inevitably lead to poverty and therefore to overcrowding. This may have been a question of priorities, as Gauldie concludes: ‘a man will not starve to pay the rent, but he will pawn all his belongings and take them to live in a hovel in the attempt to fill their stomachs’.\textsuperscript{51} Davin concurs with this assessment, describing the downward spiral into ‘ever cheaper and more wretched accommodation’ once access to credit and other sources of funds were exhausted.\textsuperscript{52}

**Conclusion**

Overcrowding was a problem in Bromley at the beginning of the period, and did not appear to be any less of an issue twenty years later. Overcrowding brought with it a lack of privacy, and for social commentators of the day, implications of immorality, which White claimed included illegitimacy.\textsuperscript{53} Such moral standards are subjective and cannot be definitively measured, and Clark suggests that they were not shared by lower classes even prior to the period of this study.\textsuperscript{54} Nonetheless, there was at least one illegitimate birth in

\textsuperscript{50} Gauldie, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{51} Gauldie, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{52} Davin, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{53} White, p.131.
the most crowded household examined. The causes of overcrowding in this area appear to be a combination of high rents, low wages and the immobility of casual or piece workers.\footnote{Wohl, p. 315.}

Throughout the course of a worker’s lifetime, the levels of overcrowding varied. Those with large families, particularly with very young children, often found themselves living in fewer rooms than was judged to be sufficient. For those forced into overcrowded conditions, the lack of means and the danger to health could lead the residents, reluctant as they may be, to turn to the Poor Law Board for assistance.
Living hand to mouth: applications for poor relief, 1900-1912

Poplar was one of the poorest boroughs in London in the late nineteenth century, and within it, Bromley was one of the poorest areas.¹ Scannell, who grew up in the area, writes of being aware that it was a slum.² A Wesleyan Minister practicing in the area categorised the residents as ‘the “poorest of the poor” and are most dependent. Have not much self respect. Not a person but is living hand to mouth.’.³ Because of the levels of deprivation in Poplar, the Poor Law Board was one of the first two to take on a paid secretary to assist with the burden of administrating the Poor Law.⁴ Poor Relief in Poplar differed from many other areas in London, and indeed in England, in that it was generally given in the form of outdoor relief rather than insisting that paupers enter the workhouse.⁵ For this reason Fishman characterises the Poplar Board as ‘more humane' than many others.⁶

Poor Law Application records: a window into the lives of the poor

The Poor Law Application books for Poplar are rare survivors of their type and offer a valuable insight into the lives of the applicants.⁷ Although not all records are fully completed, those that are contain detailed information about the applicants for poor relief. The detail includes the names, ages, place of birth and current address of the applicant

³ LSE, BOOTH/B/176, Notebook: Nonconformist Churches District 12 (Bow and Bromley), James W. Coad, p. 213 (1897).
⁵ David R Green, Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870 (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 201.
and their family including extended family who are living separately.\textsuperscript{8} For each of these people the professions and income and amounts they are able to give towards the upkeep of the family are detailed.\textsuperscript{9} Also detailed are the amount of rent paid and any arrears.\textsuperscript{10} Together these give a good idea of overall household finances. The notes section of the record was used to record details of the circumstances of the claim, such as if a man had met with an accident at work and therefore had no income.\textsuperscript{11}

**Methodology**

For this study, a period of one year either side of the census date was selected in order to give a good overview of the requests made around the time of the census. The record includes the dates of each of the requests as well as their nature, such as needing medical attention, requesting outdoor relief, or entering the workhouse.\textsuperscript{12} The record also includes the street address of the applicant so these were used to calculate the requests per street.\textsuperscript{13} Between 1902 and 1910, the PPLB changed the borders of the districts in Poplar, with the result that the later records for All Hallows and St Gabriel are spread over districts Five, Seven and Nine.\textsuperscript{14} Despite extensive research, the records for St Andrew were unobtainable. The number of households for the street was obtained from each

\textsuperscript{8} See Appendix 7 for example record.
\textsuperscript{9} Appendix 7.
\textsuperscript{10} Appendix 7.
\textsuperscript{11} Appendix 7.
\textsuperscript{12} Appendix 7.
\textsuperscript{13} Appendix 7.
\textsuperscript{14} LMA, POBG/141/10, Record of applications, District No. 4, PPLB (1899 Nov-1901 Jun) (hereafter POBG/141/10); LMA, POBG/141/11, Record of applications, District No. 4, PPLB (1901 Jun-1902 Jul) (hereafter POBG/141/11); LMA, POBG/142/19, Record of applications, District No. 5, PPLB (1908 Oct-1910 Jun) (hereafter POBG/142/19); LMA, POBG/142/20, Record of applications, District No. 5, PPLB (1910 Jun-1912 Mar) (hereafter POBG/142/20); LMA, POBG/144/17, Record of applications, District No. 7, PPLB (1909 Nov-1910 Dec) (hereafter POBG/144/17); LMA, POBG/144/18, Record of applications, District No. 7, PPLB (1910 Dec-1912 Mar) (hereafter POBG/144/18); LMA, POBG/146/06, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1909 Dec-1910 Sep) (hereafter POBG/146/06); LMA, POBG/146/07, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1910 Sep-1911 Oct) (hereafter POBG/146/07); LMA, POBG/146/08, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1911 Nov-1912 Mar) (hereafter POBG/146/08).
appropriate census, allowing a figure for the number of requests per household to be obtained and plotted on a map using a colour scale.¹⁵

An initial comparison of the Booth map with the map plotting the 1900 to 1902 relief requests shows that the differences between areas are still discernible.¹⁶ St Gabriel is generally lighter coloured, meaning there were fewer requests, and by extension that the inhabitants were not as impoverished. All Hallows is darker and St Andrew a mixture of the two. The pink streets in the parish of St Andrew in the north correspond with the better off

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¹⁶ Booth map; POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; See Appendix 3 for larger maps.
streets according to Booth’s map.\textsuperscript{17} Across all three parishes there is a very strong
correlation between those streets Booth categorised as poorest and those households
which needed to request the most assistance from the Poor Law Guardians.

**Poverty and mortality in Poplar**

The vast majority of poor law applications were for medical assistance, amounting to over
half of all of the requests made. A significant proportion of these were for admission to the
sick asylum.\textsuperscript{18} George Sims claimed that sick asylums were so preferential to the pestilent
homes children came from that they did not want to leave and that they would actually be
better off dying in there.\textsuperscript{19} Each of the admissions in the book were signed off by a medical
officer, and there is only one comment in the hundreds of cases collated where the
claimant was accused of malingering.\textsuperscript{20} This may be an example of where, as Wohl
suggests, Sims’ aim was to titillate and excite his readers rather than to accurately portray
the facts.\textsuperscript{21} Some applicants had sold most of their possessions to pay for the services of a
doctor before ill health and the threat of destitution made turning to the Poor Law Board
unavoidable. Davin argues that elderly men who could not work and who had no friends to
support them were most likely to enter a sick asylum voluntarily.\textsuperscript{22} As Booth suggests,
those who fall as low as asking for assistance are generally unable to pass the test of work
and therefore cannot support themselves.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} Booth map.
\textsuperscript{18} POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17;
POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
\textsuperscript{20} POBG/141/11 p. 2722.
\textsuperscript{21} Anthony Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London*
\textsuperscript{22} Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914*
\textsuperscript{23} Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in
The death rate for Bromley decreased very slightly (by 0.4%) between 1901 and 1911, while London as a whole decreased by 15%, so that by 1911, the death rate in Bromley was 27% higher than that of London as a whole.\textsuperscript{24} Jay states that these elevated death rates were caused by easily preventable evils such as poor housing, inadequate sanitation and the want of sufficient food.\textsuperscript{25} The poor law relief books reference cases of smallpox sent to the smallpox hospital, or in one case the smallpox ship, for treatment and quarantine.\textsuperscript{26} These occurred during the smallpox outbreak which lasted from September 1901 to September 1902.\textsuperscript{27} By contrast, there were very few cases recorded by the Medical Officer for Health for Bromley in Poplar in the reports for 1911 and 1912.\textsuperscript{28} The broad category of zymotic diseases (a term meaning acute infectious diseases such as typhoid, scarlet fever and cholera) shows a 36% rise between 1901 and 1911.\textsuperscript{29} Examining the figures for individual diseases classed as zymotic reveals a fall in deaths from scarlet fever, typhoid and diphtheria. There is a rise in deaths from measles, which jumped from 38 in 1901 to 92 in 1911, an increase of 142\%.\textsuperscript{30} Overcrowding made infectious disease inescapable. Davin quotes Pember Reeves as stating that “measles and whooping cough go round the bed as a matter of course”.\textsuperscript{31} Deaths from diarrhoea and enteritis also rose during the period from 78 to 132, a 69% increase.\textsuperscript{32} While not all cases resulting in death would have been admitted to the sick asylum, and not all admissions to the asylum would have resulted in death, it is fair to assume a link between the increased death rate and the

\textsuperscript{26} POBG/141/11, p. 2952.
\textsuperscript{27} MO Report 1913, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{28} MO Report 1913, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{29} MO Report 1913, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{30} MO Report 1913, p 127.
\textsuperscript{31} Davin, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{32} MO Report 1913, p. 127; MO Report 1913, p. 132-3.
increased admissions. The rising death rate is partially explained by the rise in infant mortality which increased by a quarter for London as a whole in 1911, but by a third for Poplar, and almost the same in Bromley. The breakdown of deaths by age shows that over a quarter of deaths in 1911 were of children under the age of one. Diarrhoea and Enteritis were the most common causes of death and accounted for two thirds of the deaths of children aged under one year in Bromley, and slightly more in the wider borough of Poplar. The effect of this epidemic was so notable that the health visitors report refers to 1911 as ‘a year marked by record epidemics – measles in the early part, diarrhoea during the exceedingly hot summer’. This specific spike in infant mortality has its roots in two epidemics, and had a greater effect in Bromley than wider London or nationally, despite the same weather conditions pertaining. This higher incidence of child mortality was perhaps expected in an area described even by a former resident as a slum. There had long been a link between poor housing and disease. Tarn argues that the cholera epidemic of 1832 highlighted the scale of the issue of sanitation not keeping pace with population growth. Lees suggests that the link of disease with poverty during the early part of the century featured a conflation of moral and physical contagion. Chadwick’s 1842 report on sanitation points to ‘damp and filth, and close and overcrowded dwellings’ as causing or exacerbating ‘epidemic, endemic, and other disease’. Both Chadwick and

33 MO Report 1913, p. 12.
Gavin attribute the prevalence of disease to the atmospheric impurities associated with the decomposition of waste in poor areas in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{40} Himmelfarb maintains Mayhew made the suggestion that there was a link between poor housing and infectious diseases such as typhoid and cholera, citing an article published in 1849.\textsuperscript{41} The nature of the link between dirt and disease may have been well understood, but still by the end of the nineteenth century few working-class people in Poplar had their own bathrooms.\textsuperscript{42} Despite this, Octavia Hill testified to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes that working-class people did not need their own bathrooms and Beatrice Webb still echoed the same sentiments at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{43} This may have been a contributory cause to the continuously high need for healthcare and the fact that disease, particularly in infancy, continued to be widespread and cause high child mortality.

In the 1911 census, respondents were asked for the first time to return the number of children of the marriage, and how many had died, which has allowed for numerous studies into fertility mortality rates.\textsuperscript{44} The census date was 2 April 1911, so deaths from the measles epidemic earlier in the year are reflected in these figures, but not deaths from the summer diarrhoea epidemic which was yet to come.\textsuperscript{45} The figures were collated from over fourteen thousand records of children born living as enumerated in the 1911 census.

\textsuperscript{45} ‘Introduction’ The 1911 UK Census <https://uk1911census.com/introduction> [accessed 7 December 2022].
Dividing the total of the number of deaths by the number of live births gives a figure which can be termed the ‘infant and child mortality rate’, following the precedent set by Eilidh Garrett and others.\textsuperscript{46} This can then be mapped in the same method as the other statistics. Evidently it is impossible to know where the children were born for most of the census records (a notable few are specific to street level), and further, where any children of a marriage have died. As Davin notes, many of the poorer families moved frequently, though not necessarily far.\textsuperscript{47} However, as the methodology described above is applied consistently to each of the streets, a meaningful comparison can still be made. The annual mortality rate of 19.01\% as found in Bromley in 1911 is extraordinarily high to the point where it requires some explanation in the Medical Officer’s report about the epidemics that gave rise to it.\textsuperscript{48} The cumulative rate calculated is much higher at 29.7\%, which is to be expected as it covers a much longer time period.

\textsuperscript{46} Garrett, p. 107-8.
\textsuperscript{47} Davin, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{48} Wellcome Collection, Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Poplar, Metropolitan Borough, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p89fsacp, p. 9 (1913).
Figure 9 - PPLB District Four relative mortality map. Source: 1911 Census; Digimap

The mortality map generated shows the streets of All Hallows, especially the Fenian Barracks to the east of the district, and the northern part of St Gabriel to the south below the Limehouse Cut exhibiting the highest mortality rates. The figures for these areas were increased by cases such as Kate North of Lingen Street in St Gabriel, a forty-five-year-old woman employed as a scrubber at the sick asylum, who had lost all but one of her twelve children, and James Chambers, a fifty-two-year-old costermonger living in Devons Road in
All Hallows who had buried all but four of his seventeen children.\(^{49}\) These high numbers of child deaths in one family are extreme, but hardly unique. Out of over 2,450 households who were enumerated as having had children, almost 1600, or 65\%, had experienced the death of a child. Scannell, in her biography, attributes the ‘miraculous’ survival of all ten of the children of her family to her mother, without whom ‘in that district in those circumstances the majority of us would have been natural or self-induced miscarriages or infant mortalities’.\(^{50}\) While this is overstating the case according to the 1911 census figures, as even on the worst street in the district some 60\% of children survived, clearly the perception was that it was fortunate to survive a Poplar childhood.

‘The cry for work’ in All Hallows

All Hallows parish was described in the 1881 census as being ‘an illiterate and a very poor one’\(^{51}\). Even by 1912 the local MP talked of the poverty that blighted Bow and Bromley which rendered the residents dependent on aid.\(^{52}\) The population decreased by 8\% over the decade, but the number of requests rose by over a third between 1901 and 1911, meaning that the number of requests rose from one for every three households to one for every two.\(^{53}\) The trend for All Hallows is one of increasing, not decreasing, want. The fortunes of the streets are mixed, but of the twenty-two streets in the parish only six made


\(^{50}\) Scannell, p. 24.


\(^{52}\) Gibson-Brydon, p. 104.

\(^{53}\) POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
fewer requests per household than in 1901. Those in the Fenian Barracks were visibly in the greatest want overall, notwithstanding the lack of requests on one side of Furze Street as depicted by the pink colouration on the map. The number of requests per hundred households for the streets in the Fenian Barracks was 50 in 1901 and 65 in 1911, consistently over double the amount for the rest of the area. This indicates that the extreme want indicated by the categorisation of the streets by Booth was still in evidence in 1911.

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Figure 10 - All Hallows, Bromley relief request maps. Source: 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census; Digimap

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54 POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
55 POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
The increase in the number of people being admitted to the sick asylum in All Hallows increased in line with the overall area, with over twenty-four requests per hundred households, up from just seven, an increase of over 230%. This indicates that poor housing conditions had increased the prevalence of disease to a dramatic extent.

The most marked rise is in requests for outdoor relief. In contrast to St Gabriel’s parish where the relief requests per household dropped over the period, requests for outdoor relief increased by almost 400%. This rise indicates a neighbourhood where wages are not keeping pace with the needs of the populace. In 1901, Mr Wilson of Gale Street claimed that he had been ‘subsisting on the generosity of his mates’, and others were assisted by friends and family. By 1911 there are no such comments, and fewer records of regular assistance from family, indicating that poverty and insecurity of wages had become so widespread that they were less able to assist one another. Arthur E Copping, a social journalist of the time, visited All Hallows and in particular the Fenian Barracks in late 1905. He described the desperate poverty there as arising from a ‘work famine’, so severe that even seasonal work such as hopping (going to farms in Kent to harvest hops) was so oversubscribed that the earnings were much smaller than in previous years. Reay states that hop-picking was a major part of the labouring culture, both in Kent and in the London Docklands, and Stedman Jones adds that the seasonal income earned in this way was vital to the family economy to pay off debts. This widespread ‘work famine’ exacerbated

56 POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
57 POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
58 POBG/141/11, p. 2894.
the problems of a population whose incomes were already precarious and prone to be adversely affected by competition and economic depression.\textsuperscript{61}

One contemporary source claimed All Hallows was ‘the centre of a surprising amount of religious effort’.\textsuperscript{62} The mission operating in this area was criticised in its methods both by Booth and the Charity Organisation Society who claimed it had never been convinced its work was constructive or useful.\textsuperscript{63} They concluded that it practised the sort of ‘indiscriminate giving’ that Jay, a minister working with the poor in Shoreditch, calls kind but harmful.\textsuperscript{64} Bourke ascribes both method and ideology as reasons for the failure of charities in working class areas like this.\textsuperscript{65} Whatever the reason, the continued work in this area does not seem to have alleviated the extreme poverty of All Hallows.

In a two-century long study of wages against the cost of living, Rufus S. Tucker concludes that real wages declined after 1897.\textsuperscript{66} The privations were felt particularly keenly in the industrial and dockland areas of Britain, including Poplar, ultimately leading to a series of strikes during the Great Unrest in 1912.\textsuperscript{67} Both the decline in wages and the loss of wages for strikers contributed to the increased need for assistance. One such example is Henry Tyler, a coal porter of St Gabriel, who claimed for assistance for his family in late August of

\textsuperscript{63} Copping, p. 7; LMA, A/FWA/C/D273, Tryphena Mission (case 21496); vol 3: correspondence and papers: 205 Devons Road, Bow Common Road, Charity Organisation Society, Letter dated 20 December 1933 (1931 – 1941).
\textsuperscript{64} Jay, p. 78.
1911 when he had been on strike for four weeks.\textsuperscript{68} Like many who joined a union at this time, he had not been a member of the dockers union long enough to be given benefits by them.

**St Gabriel: pensions and privation**

The parish of St Gabriel also saw a rise in the number of requests per household, despite a fall in the population.\textsuperscript{69} As with the area as a whole, sick asylum admissions increased though not as dramatically as those in All Hallows.\textsuperscript{70} In sharp contrast to All Hallows there was a fall in requests for outdoor relief over the period, but an increase in kind given, which, in many cases in the records, was awarded when the main wage earner was hospitalised and could no longer earn any money.\textsuperscript{71} For example, Mrs Allen of Cordelia Street in St Gabriel, a widow who had lost her husband in an accident in Wales, her heart condition so weakened her that she sent a neighbour round to get a ‘hospital letter’ on her behalf, and on leaving hospital received kind as she was unable to support herself.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[69] POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
\item[70] POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
\item[71] POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
\item[72] POBG/146/06, p. 1736.
\end{footnotes}
The map tells a story of mixed fortunes, with the streets to the south of the parish generally seeing fewer relief requests and those in the north seeing more. The chief cause of the rise in requests was sickness, but lack of work, marital breakdown or the loss of the male wage earners income was also to blame, and often a combination of these factors.\(^{73}\) Jemima Robbie of Flint Street, St Gabriel, whose husband had been out of work for 12 weeks, claimed in her interview that ‘her husband had led her such a life and had told her to take herself off’ and that she was now living with her eldest daughter and receiving no assistance at all from her other seven daughters, most of whom had no income of their own, or her son who was living a few doors down the street, despite his being single and earning 13/6 a week at the tobacco factory.\(^{74}\) At 58, now living alone, with her estranged husband in the sick asylum and with no support and no income save from poorly paid needlework at home, she was still refusing the workhouse, but without a change in

\(^{73}\) POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.

\(^{74}\) POBG/146/07, p. 1814.
circumstances, it seemed almost inevitable that she would end up there.\(^75\) As Jack London states of women separated from their husbands and dependent on an allowance, ‘her game was up when his working capacity was impaired or destroyed’.\(^76\) While London is a novelist and therefore intending to sell books with his narrative, Swafford argues that London offers a more substantial representation than previous narratives which aimed to shock into action by presenting a view of the poor as a race apart.\(^77\) He backs this up with opinions from Stephen Conlon and Jack Lindsay, that London’s method and perspective allowed him to present the views of the East Enders from the viewpoint of an insider.\(^78\)

Jack London also asserted that poverty in old age was an inevitability.\(^79\) Booth and Rowntree, following their investigations into poverty, campaigned and published statistically backed arguments for pensions for the old which were taken up by the Liberal Party and finally enacted in parliament.\(^80\) The Old Age Pensions Act 1908 granted a pension to people aged over seventy with an income under twenty one pounds a year.\(^81\) While the introduction of the state pension is seen as a landmark event in the introduction of a welfare state, Johnson argues that the Act merely put into law that which was already happening through the Poor Laws.\(^82\) Ellen Ross states that the pension, despite an


\(^{78}\) Swafford, p.856.

\(^{79}\) London, p. 135.


\(^{82}\) Johnson, p. 215.
increase in 1911 from the initial paltry sum offered, was insufficient to meet the needs of
the poor, or lessen their reliance on networks of mutual aid. This reading of the situation
would not seem to be borne out by the data gained from the Poor Law Relief Books. If it
was the case, the number of requests for assistance from people over the age of seventy
would not be noticeably different between the 1900 to 1902 and the 1910 to 1912
assistance books. In fact, there is a clearly marked difference reflected in the collated
figures; in 1901 people over seventy made up 1.2% of the population and 8% of
applicants, by 1911 this had dropped to 2% of applicants, despite having risen to 1.3% of
the population. Of those applications, the proportions of requests for medical assistance
remained relatively steady but the percentage going into the workhouse increased from
5% to 22%. Although they are very small figures by this stage and not necessarily
significant, they do point to the possibility that older people needing assistance were those
now unable to care for themselves even with a pension. Ross posits that mutual aid
networks were essentially unchanged by the introduction of pensions. Contemporary
accounts and autobiographies relate that people did get assistance of various kinds
through their neighbours, who would assist in a time of crisis if they were able to. The
increased incidence of requests for aid points to a failure of these networks to cope with
the degree of need.

Conclusion

Despite a drop in population in all of the parishes in the study area and the introduction of
old age pensions, which should have gone some way to alleviate poverty for those eligible,
the number of claims for assistance from the Poor Law Board increased between 1901

84 POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06;
POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
85 Ross, p. 20.
86 Copping, p. 8; Davin, p. 58.
and 1911\textsuperscript{87}. A large percentage of that increase was in the requests for medical assistance, which can be largely attributed to the measles and diarrhoea epidemics in 1911, which claimed many lives.\textsuperscript{88} The introduction of old age pensions appears to have had an impact as the number of claims for assistance among people over seventy reduced over the period. This slight reduction was more than counteracted by increases in requests among the rest of the population. Requests per household increased both for health-related issues and for material assistance.\textsuperscript{89} This increase in the latter may have been attributable to economic conditions including low wages, which declined throughout the period to a level where they were a trigger for widespread industrial action.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87} POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
\textsuperscript{88} POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08; MO Report 1913.
\textsuperscript{89} POBG/141/10; POBG/141/11; POBG/142/19; POBG/142/20; POBG/144/17; POBG/144/18; POBG/146/06; POBG/146/07; POBG/146/08.
\textsuperscript{90} Rule, p. 15.
Strikes and starvation wages: mapping poverty, 1891 - 1911

Charles Booth's maps of poverty for the area of Bromley in Poplar, show a range of classifications from the very poorest to middle income.¹ Using the rich data available in the census returns for the area, it should be possible not only to approximate Booth’s mapping, but to create a similar mapping for years when he did not carry out his survey. Mann and Davies assert that it is impossible to get an accurate impression of households via the ‘census method’ of going door to door asking questions.² If so, it is less likely that this can be gained from the census itself, which has particular aims not aligned with impressionistic social investigation. Methods of social investigation vary, however, and while the use of the census may not be appropriate for impressionistic investigation it may be usefully used for statistical investigation.³ Armstrong’s method for assigning social class by occupation as given in the census enumerators books is a statistical investigation, and is one which Mills and Schürer assert should be used by any serious study of social stratification.⁴

Armstrong stresses the need to look at the general in order to generate useful analysis rather than focussing a small group of cases, which he claims verges on antiquarianism.⁵ Shorter warns that any classification of groups is liable to be lacking in nuance and

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¹ LSE, 'Map', (hereafter Booth map) Charles Booth's London <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/> [accessed 10 July 2021].
⁵ Armstrong, p191.
insensitive to ‘the reality behind the job labels’. Spagnoli points out that there is a risk that local and temporal variations may affect the applicability of the classification to other census years and areas. Clearly there is a need to exercise caution and the methodology has been amended to address this.

**Methodology: adapting Armstrong’s method to replicate Booth’s poverty maps**

Booth used occupation as a proxy for the ‘meagre and perhaps unreliable’ data available for household income. Armstrong’s methodology expands on the initial mapping of occupation to class and details over 3000 occupations mapped to classes. Armstrong’s Class Six does not directly equate to Booth’s Black class because that is not a socio-economic class so much as a ‘description of a lifestyle’, and the implication of criminality is not something that can be inferred from the occupation.

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9 Armstrong, pp. 198-253.
The occupations enumerated for District Four in the 1891, 1901 and 1911 censuses contained an additional 2,500 occupations. These were classified according to the industrial segments listed in the scheme, such as ‘factory-worker (manufacture not specified)’ and ‘unskilled manual workers’ which were assigned to Classes Four and Five respectively. Occupations where the work could be skilled or unskilled were classified as intermediate in Armstrong’s scheme. Such occupations include seamstresses, laundresses and match-box makers who might be salaried employed workers or undertaking piece work from home as ‘sweated labour’ working for ‘starvation wages’. Similarly, there was a hierarchy of dock labourers which held as true in Roberts’ Salford as

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11 LSE, 'What were the poverty maps?' (hereafter Map definition) Charles Booth’s London <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/learn-more/what-were-the-poverty-maps> [accessed 10 September 2021].
14 Armstrong, p. 203.
it did in the London Docklands. Casual labourers, those who had no guarantee of work on any day, were generally agreed to be the lowest in the hierarchy. The permanent workers were more comfortably off, and the stevedores, who were more skilled and thus better paid, highest in the hierarchy. As the majority of workers in Bromley worked in these occupations, marking all of these as intermediate would have resulted in inconclusive results so these were further distinguished by examining for each worker whether they were enumerated as employed, own account, or working from home and assigned a class accordingly. Creating a map is an addition to the method outlined by Armstrong but in light of its source, and as a method of conveying qualitative information, it is appropriate.

**The poverty maps created using Armstrong’s method**

Booth’s 1902 map based on his inquiry into poverty between 1886 and 1901, was the first to cover the study area of Bromley. The map created from the 1901 census should be similar given the closeness of the dates. The similarity when comparing them indicates that the methodology has resulted in a very similar distribution of classes across the district.

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18 Rule, p. 248.
19 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
22 1901 Census.
Where there are areas of dark blue streets on Booth’s 1902 poverty map, the same areas are shaded in dark blue in the 1901 map created using Armstrong’s method.23 The same can also be said for the lighter colours. While there is discrepancy in some streets in the lower half of the map, the streets in the north of the district are a very close match. Given this, it is safe to assume that the methodology functions as described and gives a good approximation of the classes Booth assigned to streets. It can therefore be used to map the 1889 and 1911 census data to give an idea of the changes to the socio-economic landscape of the area over the time period.

The way in which Booth applied his classification has been criticised by Freeman and Hennock as inaccurate as it uses second-hand impressions.24 Vaughan defends the

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23 Booth map, 1901 Census; See Appendix 6 for larger maps.
24 Freeman, p. 109, Chinn, p. 28.
classification as being ‘as precise and as scientific as could be achieved at the time’. It is possible that both of these are valid points. Booth could scarcely have collated all of the data he did without assistance, and while this inevitably would have led to his methodology being imperfect, the conclusions, Chinn argues, are valid nonetheless. Clearly the data collected using Armstrong’s classifications, relying as it does on census data that cannot in itself always be trusted, comes with some caveats. However, as the method is consistently applied, useful comparisons can still be drawn.

All Hallows: the Fenian Barracks and the precariat

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Figure 14 – All Hallows, Bromley poverty map. Source: 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census; Digimap; Armstrong, pp. 198-253

The maps created for All Hallows give an initial impression of continuity, rather than change. The poorest area of the parish, the grid of streets in the south west known as the Fenian Barracks, remains almost entirely shaded in dark blue, signifying Class Five, throughout the period. These households are largely men who are out of work or casually

26 Chinn, p32.
employed and women taking in piece work from 'sweaters'. Their income was unreliable and even when available never highly paid. They would have worked long hours for little reward, leaving little time for any other household tasks. As Bourke argues, the low wages, childcare costs and the inability to economise by doing household tasks cheaply, often meant that women were better off out of work than in it. The fact that Booth found that in the poorer streets about thirty percent of women were working indicates a lack of alternative in those households.

The streets of the Fenian Barracks appear to worsen during the period, with those in the Mixed class and Class Four showing in the dark blue of Class Five by the 1911 census. Around a third of all the workers in the area are labourers, so it is reasonable to assume that the change of class during the period indicates increased casualization. Casualization, the instability of employment, was an issue that Fishman claims was already a problem in 1888. Stedman Jones notes casualization particularly affected Poplar from the 1860s onwards. Green sets the onset of the 'crisis of pauperism' in the East End due to casualisation a decade earlier. Despite the long and increasingly severe nature of the issue it only became the focus of efforts to alleviate poverty as late as 1914.

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27 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census; Webb, p. 332.
31 1911 Census.
The number of people in the lower classes (blues and black) in each of the years covered far outweighs those in higher classes. The census for this area notes that the extreme poverty and illiteracy of the area ‘will account for the very great number of “general labourers”’, so this is not an unexpected result. The number of people who are comfortably off increased in 1901, then decreased slightly again. Bédarida states that the outward migration to Essex of people who were better off was particularly notable in Bromley, so this could certainly be a cause of the lack of growth in the higher classes. He goes on to state that simultaneously another type of migration occurred, whereby people displaced by slum clearance in neighbouring boroughs were pushed into Poplar by ‘sheer misery’. This is reflected in the increasing number of people in classes Five and Six, those in precarious employment or lacking employment at all. Economic decline would

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38 Bédarida, p. 167.
have made permanent roles scarcer for men in the wharves and factories surrounding Limehouse Cut which borders the parish to the south.\textsuperscript{39} Without permanent roles they would have joined the ranks of the casual workers looking for employment on the East or West India docks.\textsuperscript{40} This work was precarious and there was no guarantee of income from one day to the next, pushing the onus of earning onto the rest of the family.\textsuperscript{41}

Duckworth notes that there was a lack of work for men in the area: young boys would be taken on, but laid off again by seventeen, so the home had to be supported by women and children.\textsuperscript{42} Duckworth states that this was when they started to expect higher wages but Scannell attributes this to the need to pay National Insurance contributions at seventeen.\textsuperscript{43} Bourke and de la Mare also note this as common to working class cultures nationally,, leaving men emasculated and women needing to work.\textsuperscript{44} As Stedman Jones points out, this had the effect of increasing competition for work and driving down both availability and earnings, spreading the impact of the lack of work in the docks into other areas of industry.\textsuperscript{45} Although there are a large number of women occupied in sweatied work throughout the period, by far the main increase in female employment during this period in Bromley is in factory work.\textsuperscript{46} Woodward, in her semi-autobiographical novel, calls factory work ‘hideous’.\textsuperscript{47} However, de la Mare says it was more appealing to women in a variety of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{40}Bill Pyne, \textit{Fly a Flag for Poplar}.
\bibitem{42}LSE, BOOTH/B/346, George H. Duckworth's Notebook: Police District 11 [Poplar and Limehouse], District 12 [Bow and Bromley] and District 13 [South Hackney and Hackney], George H. Duckworth, p. 169 (1897).
\bibitem{44}Bourke, p. 112; Ursula de la Mare, 'Necessity and Rage: The Factory Women's Strikes in Bermondsey, 1911', \textit{History Workshop}, 66 (2008), pp. 62-80 (p. 66-7).
\bibitem{45}Stedman Jones, p 48.
\bibitem{46}1911 Census: Bromley: Districts 4-6 and 23-28, https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/2352/images/rg14_01681_0000_02.
\end{thebibliography}
ways, so perhaps it is unsurprising for women to prefer it to sweated work in an area where there is an abundance of factory work available.\textsuperscript{48} Greenwood points out that more money could be earned in service, but factory girls preferred their freedom, a sentiment with which de la Mare agrees although adds that camaraderie was also part of the appeal.\textsuperscript{49} Factory girls gained a reputation both in reporting and in fiction as ‘hard-living and gregarious’.\textsuperscript{50} This would perhaps have precluded them from obtaining a position in service in any case, and some adverts even stipulated that ‘factory girls need not apply’.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{St Gabriel: commercial success and model housing}

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

\textit{Figure 15 - St Gabriel, Bromley poverty maps. Source: 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census; Digimap; Armstrong, pp. 198-253}

A closer look at another of the parishes, St Gabriel, in the south of the district, shows more continuity, but also an uplift in the class of Chrisp Street, that runs from the north of the parish in a curve down towards the south east. Beginning the period in the fairly

\textsuperscript{48} de la Mare, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{49} James Greenwood, \textit{Low-Life Deeps} (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881), p. 151; de la Mare, p 68.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{East End News and London Shipping Chronicle}, 15 September 1905, p. 4.
comfortable Class Three the households on this commercial road largely rose to the Class Two for the subsequent censuses.\textsuperscript{52} This is the highest class seen in any of the streets in the whole of District Four. The vicarage on its own is the only building in Class One. Dorothy Scannell, who grew up in Poplar very close to this area, talks in her memoir about the residents of Chrisp Street as living in a ‘high social sphere’ and being friends with them like ‘associating with royalty’ so the difference in class was evident to the residents at the time.\textsuperscript{53} Even years later, the street remained a busy and bustling commercial street which also housed a market and attracted people as much for shopping as for the socialising and gossip that went with it.\textsuperscript{54} Busy and popular shops conferred a higher status on their owners compared to the working-class residents of the neighbouring streets.

Kerbey Street ran parallel to Chrisp Street and on it were Johnson’s Buildings Model Dwellings. These buildings are the only such model dwellings in the area, and would seem to contradict the claim in the survey of London that no philanthropic housing was built in Poplar up till 1919.\textsuperscript{55} The aim of building model dwellings was to house the poorest workers in decent, affordable accommodation. This was something which Henry Roberts championed as a right.\textsuperscript{56} Gauldie claims all such housing schemes failed to achieve these aims, and had to relax their social class criteria as the rooms were not affordable for the poorest workers.\textsuperscript{57} Johnson’s Buildings did house working people of the lowest class consistently throughout the period, which contradicts Gauldie’s conclusions. This study only covers a twenty-year period, so perhaps the occupancy changed later on. At the

\textsuperscript{52} 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
\textsuperscript{53} Scannell, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{54} Joe Mitchell, \textit{Fly a Flag for Poplar}.
\textsuperscript{55} Institute of Historical Research, 'Public Housing in Poplar: The Years to 1919' \textit{British History Online} <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp21-23> [accessed 3 December 2021]
\textsuperscript{57} Gauldie, p. 221.
times of the census, the buildings have 80-90% occupancy, something that Webb struggles to achieve in Katharine Buildings, a Peabody Estate in Whitechapel, and claims that others are not able to achieve either.\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps this is due to the size of the estate. Johnson’s Buildings only comprises 10 separate, multi-roomed dwellings, where Katharine Buildings has 281 separate rooms, so is on a much larger scale.\textsuperscript{59} Overall, the residents of St Gabriel appear to enjoy a higher standard of living throughout the period than those of All Hallows in the north, where abject poverty was perpetually a misstep away.\textsuperscript{60}

**Bromley: deprivation and industrial action**

![Bromley classes over time](chart2.png)

*Chart 2 - Distribution of population of Bromley, Poplar by class. Source: 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census; Armstrong, pp. 198-253*

Comparing the class demographic trends for the entire region of Bromley throughout the period of the study shows a decline in residents in Class Three, those with comfortable incomes, over the period.\textsuperscript{61} These workers are not as dependent on proximity to the docks

\textsuperscript{58} Webb, p. 274 and pp. 272-3.
\textsuperscript{59} Webb, p. 267.
\textsuperscript{61} 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
or factories for work, or to the cheapest markets.\textsuperscript{62} When people can travel to work, not for it, they may choose to raise their families where there is more space. The decline shown in these figures could indicate exactly this form of migration out to the suburbs for those who could afford it, leaving the poorest behind.\textsuperscript{63} Overall, the picture is one of a decline in the numbers of those better off and an increase in poorer people who are less able to move and need to stay close to support networks and sources of income.\textsuperscript{64}

There is a marked increase in the 1911 census for the lowest socio-economic class. They number almost 400 people, around 6\% of the population of the area, living in households with no reliable means of income. The numbers of people in Class Five households, those with low paid and casual work including casual dock workers and women working at home, rose then levelled out over the period.\textsuperscript{65} According to Booth’s definition, for most of the population of the borough, their income would have been barely sufficient to meet their needs.\textsuperscript{66} In his investigation into conditions in Tower Hamlets, a district which includes Poplar, Booth concluded that those with low and intermittent earnings were ‘more than any others, the victims of competition, and on them falls with particular severity the weight of recurrent depressions of trade’.\textsuperscript{67} It appears that the pressures of ill recompensed, monotonous work that HG Wells and Sidney Low identified as spurs to strike action were all prevalent in Poplar during this period.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{62} Gauldie, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{63} Gauldie, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{64} Bourke, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{65} 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
Thompson and Darlington ascribe factors such as the inequality of distribution of resources and discontent with politicians for failing to address the difficulties faced by a more literate working class as triggers for strike action.\(^6^9\) Bourke describes the motivation for striking as being a ‘desperate cry for the status of manhood’: the inability to feed ones family being a mark of shame.\(^7^0\) The success of the match girls strike at Bryant and May in Bromley, championed by Annie Besant, had improved the conditions of the match workers which both Besant and Williams likened at the time to slavery.\(^7^1\) Some 13% of women workers in Bromley worked in the match industry in 1891, so at least some of the residents of Bromley would have benefited from the increased wages and better conditions.\(^7^2\) Pyne asserts that their success also encouraged the dock workers to feel strike action could succeed.\(^7^3\) The dock strikes of 1889 started in Poplar and secured the ‘dockers’ tanner’, a fixed minimum amount of pay.\(^7^4\) Around a third of all of the working men in Bromley were labourers of some kind throughout the period.\(^7^5\) While some were in permanent positions, around 27% of male workers were casual or general dock labourers at the start of the period, and would therefore have benefitted.\(^7^6\) Hard won increases aside, all of the lower classes would have been affected by the fall in wages after 1897, coinciding with rising prices for goods, which may explain the rising levels of destitution.\(^7^7\) The failure of wages to keep up with inflation caused privation and unrest.

\(^6^9\) Thompson, p. 44; Ralph Darlington, ‘The pre-First World War British women’s suffrage revolt and labour unrest: never the twain shall meet?’, Labour History Review, 61 (2020), pp. 466-485 (p. 467).

\(^7^0\) Bourke, p. 130-1.


\(^7^2\) 1891 Census.

\(^7^3\) Bill Pyne, Fly a Flag for Poplar.

\(^7^4\) Bill Pyne, Fly a Flag for Poplar.

\(^7^5\) 1891 Census; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.

\(^7^6\) 1901 Census.

The declining conditions and the recent history of success gave rise to the subsequent series of strikes which spread out from Poplar from 1911 until the beginning of the first world war to such an extent that the period became known as the Great Labour Unrest.\textsuperscript{78} Notable within the strikes of 1911 was a smaller scale and less organised strike led by the women of Bermondsey who were employed in confectionery, packaging, tin-box, jam and biscuit-making factories.\textsuperscript{79} In the census for Bromley in 1911 many women were working in the same industries, and presumably working in similar conditions to the strikers in Bermondsey, who also compared their conditions to slavery.\textsuperscript{80} The decline into widespread strike action just over twenty years after the dockers and match workers strikes indicates that conditions for the poorest were no better at the end of the period than at the beginning.

**Conclusion**

An adaptation of the method outlined by Armstrong was applied to the data, with amendments for the additional occupations particular to the area and the census year. The resulting class mapping showed both continuity and change, with a broader picture of improvement towards the turn of the century and subsequent decline. There are many possible reasons for this, including migration out to the suburbs for those who no longer needed to be close to the docks, keeping the ratio of higher economic groups lower. Broader socio-economic trends would also have contributed: a decline in wages from around the middle of the period and higher rates of unemployment which pushed men into casual work and women into poorly paid factory work and sweated labour.\textsuperscript{81} The only improvements in conditions seem to have been gained by the industrial action before the

\textsuperscript{78} Thompson, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{79} de la Mare, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{80} 1911 Census.
\textsuperscript{81} Tucker, p. 81; Bourke, p. 112; de la Mare, p. 66-7.
period, and which broke out again in more force at the end of the period as conditions deteriorated.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{82} Bill Pyne, Fly a Flag for Poplar; Thompson, p.41.
Conclusion

Summary
This study set out to examine whether there was any noticeable improvement in the standards of living for the residents of Bromley in the East End of London over a twenty-year period from 1891 to 1911. The standard of living was judged by three markers of poverty: overcrowding, requests for poor relief and the class of the household according to Booth's classification.

The introduction addressed the selection of the area and the premise of the study: that if the multiple agencies attempting to tackle poverty were successful in their aims, that success should be measurable. Chapter one assessed overcrowding as a measure of poverty and used maps created from census data to illustrate the relative levels of overcrowding for each of the census years. The requests for assistance from the Poor Law Board were examined in chapter two for the years 1900-1902 and 1910-1912, and maps created to illustrate the levels of demand. Chapter three drew on the employment data from the 1891, 1901 and 1911 census returns to assign classes to each of the streets in a similar way to Booth, using a method outlined by Armstrong.¹

Conclusion
The result was a clear picture of decline over the period for all three measures. The causes of the increase in overcrowding were a combination of factors including unemployment, high rents and the inability of an increasingly casualized workforce to move away from an area where casual work was available and where support networks

Requests for assistance from the Poor Law Board also rose indicating that the populace of Bromley was increasingly unable to subsist without aid. The main cause of the increase was due to epidemics of infectious disease, which also had a notable effect on mortality rates. Requests for outdoor relief also rose, and this may have been attributable to worsening economic conditions as wages and available work declined. There was a slight reduction in the number of requests from people over seventy following the introduction of old age pensions in 1908, but not enough to counterbalance the overall decline. Using Armstrong’s class attribution method, the mapping also showed a marked decline by the time of the 1911 census. This is largely attributable to the decline of the nearby docks and the shift into casual work, and the reliance on women’s and children’s income that accompanied widespread male unemployment.

For all of the maps produced, the close correlation to the Booth map validated the methodology and data source used. This in turn validates the impression of decline gained from all of the metrics. Contemporary accounts relate the reality of a ‘work famine’ so severe and wide reaching that the residents had little hope of improving their situation. As Booth’s investigator Duckworth predicted, the area continued to degenerate. The few secondary sources commenting on the area support this picture of an area declining to

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7 LSE, BOOTH/B/346, George H. Duckworth's Notebook: Police District 11 [Poplar and Limehouse], District 12 [Bow and Bromley] and District 13 [South Hackney and Hackney], George H. Duckworth, p. 169-171 (1897).
such an extent that the end of the period saw widespread strikes that continued until the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{8}

Having proved the efficacy of Armstrong’s method, it could be applied to other areas for comparison. Similar areas in London or other cities, which perhaps were less reliant on the declining dock industry, or the focus of more concerted efforts to relieve poverty would provide a useful contrast. Comparison could also usefully be made with similar locations in Liverpool or Glasgow that were also reliant on the shipping industry and also involved in the great unrest.\textsuperscript{9} Perhaps there was some improvement in some of these areas, or as Vaughan observes, and the \textit{Economist} corroborates, areas of ‘concentrated disadvantage’ remain remarkably stable over time.\textsuperscript{10} If this is the case, then it may not only have been in Bromley that the ‘multi-campaign war on pauperism’ was not won.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{8} Thompson, p. 39.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Appendices

Appendix 1  Poplar Union district map detail
Appendix 2  Booth map detail
Appendix 3  Overcrowding maps
Appendix 4  Relief request maps
Appendix 5  Mortality map
Appendix 6  Poverty maps
Appendix 7  Relief request book sample page
Appendix 1 - Poplar Union district map detail

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Map 1 - Section from the PPLB District map showing District Four in green. Source: LMA, POBG/284/01, Poplar Union relief districts, Poplar Poor Law Board of Guardians (1882)
Appendix 2 - Booth map detail

Map 2 - Section from the 1902 Booth map with PPLB District 4 outlined and key inset. Source: LSE, 'Map' Charles Booth's London <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/15/-0.0145/51.5183/100/0> [accessed 10 July 2021]
Appendix 3 - Overcrowding maps

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Map 4 - PPLB District Four 1901 overcrowding map. Source: 1901 Census, Digimap
Map 5 - PPLB District Four 1911 overcrowding map. Source: 1911 Census, Digimap
Appendix 4 - Relief request maps

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Map 6 - PPLB District Four 1901 poor law assistance requests map. Source: LMA, POBG/141/10, Record of applications, District No. 4, PPLB (1899 Nov-1901 Jun); LMA, POBG/141/11, Record of applications, District No. 4, PPLB (1901 Jun-1902 Jul); 1901 Census; Digimap
Map 7 - PPLB District Four 1911 poor law assistance requests map. Source: LMA, POBG/142/19, Record of applications, District No. 5, PPLB (1908 Oct-1910 Jun); LMA, POBG/142/20, Record of applications, District No. 5, PPLB (1910 Jun-1912 Mar); LMA, POBG/144/17, Record of applications, District No. 7, PPLB (1909 Nov-1910 Dec); LMA, POBG/144/18, Record of applications, District No. 7, PPLB (1910 Dec-1912 Mar); LMA, POBG/146/06, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1909 Dec-1910 Sep); LMA, POBG/146/07, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1910 Sep-1911 Oct); LMA, POBG/146/08, Record of applications, District No. 9, PPLB (1911 Nov-1912 Mar); 1911 Census; Digimap
Appendix 5 - Mortality map

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Map 8 - PPLB District Four relative mortality map. Source: 1911 Census, Digimap
Appendix 6 - Poverty maps

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Map 9 - 1891 PPLB District Four Booth Armstrong poverty classes map. Source: 1891 Census, Digimap
Map 10 - 1901 PPLB District Four Booth Armstrong poverty classes map. Source: 1901 Census, Digimap
Map 11 - 1911 PPLB District Four Booth Armstrong poverty classes map. Source: 1911 Census; Digimap
Appendix 7 - Relief request book sample page

"IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS"

* Document 1 - Example poor law application. LMA, POBG/141/10, Record of applications, District No. 4, PPLB (1899 Nov-1901 Jun), p. 2616. 
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