

# ORVILLE ROAD, BATTERSEA: A VICTORIAN SLUM – A CASE STUDY OF CHARLES BOOTH’S SURVEY

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## SUMMARY

*The colour-coded Maps of London Poverty published by ship-owner turned social investigator Charles Booth (1840–1916) provide a striking and iconic image of late Victorian London, excerpts from which appear in every general history of the period. As is often the case with visual aids that simplify reality, the truth is more complex. The maps, however, do not exist in isolation; there are 17 printed volumes and a mass of unpublished material. Given the immensity of Booth’s survey, any investigation of the relationship between the various sources of data produced and synthesised by him, both published and manuscript, and comparison with other sources, notably the Census enumerators’ books, needs to focus on relatively small areas. This paper provides a general discussion of Booth’s surveys of Battersea in 1888–9 and 1899, followed by a detailed examination of the area’s two streets coloured ‘black’ by Booth. It reveals a constant process of revision underlying the two versions of the map, and also the extent to which Booth relied upon the testimony of individuals with intimate local knowledge, whose agendas were not driven by statistical or cartographic considerations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Motivated by the debate about poverty in London taking place in the 1880s, Charles Booth set out to provide a statistical analysis of the extent of poverty in the capital (Booth 1892–1903; O’Day & Englander 1993).<sup>1</sup> His inspired use of colour-coded maps to display the results of street-by-street surveys, using

seven colours from yellow to black to depict degrees of wealth and poverty, provides an iconic image of the era.

There were two editions of the map. The first, known as the *Descriptive Map of London Poverty* was created in 1889 and published in 1891.<sup>2</sup> It covers the area from Kensington in the west to Poplar in the east, and from Kentish Town in the north to Stockwell in the south. A second, revised version, known as the *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty* was created in 1898–1900 and extended the area covered to Hammersmith in the west, Greenwich in the east, Hampstead in the north, and Clapham Common in the south. It was published in 1902–3. Sectional extracts appear in the *Religious Influences* volumes that represent the culmination of 15 years’ work by Booth.

Booth and his collaborators undertook street-by-street surveys, and also gathered information from School Board Visitors, the clergy and others involved in missionary and social work. The revision of 1898–1900 was based on perambulations accompanied by local policemen. All these individuals had their own perspectives, of course, although Booth designed his categories to avoid subjectivity as much as possible (Table 1).

In the first volume of the final edition of *Life and Labour of the People in London* (Booth 1902, vol 1, 33–62), Booth further develops the system of classification, using an eight-tier system, summarised in Table 2 above.<sup>3</sup>

Combinations of colours are sometimes

Table 1. Description of classes on London Poverty Maps

Colour	Description
BLACK	Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.
DARK BLUE	Very poor, casual. Chronic want.
LIGHT BLUE	Poor. 18s to 21s a week for a moderate family.
PURPLE	Mixed. Some comfortable others poor.
PINK	Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
RED	Middle class. Well-to-do.
YELLOW	Upper-middle and upper classes. Wealthy.

Table 2. Charles Booth's classification of social class

Class	Description
A	Lowest class, some occasional labourers, street sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals.
B	Casual earnings, very poor. Not so much one where men are born, but where those incapable of better work are deposited.
C	Intermittent earning; 18s–21s per week for a moderate family, particularly affected by trade depressions. Labourers, poorer artisans and street sellers. Irregularity of employment may be daily, weekly or seasonal.
D	Small regular earnings. Factory, dock and warehouse labourers, carmen, messengers and porters. As a whole, none rise above poverty, but not many are very poor. Generally steady, bringing up children respectably.
E	Regular standard earnings, 22s–30s per week. Fairly comfortable. Wives generally do not work, but children do.
F	Higher class labour and best-paid artisans, exceeding 30s per week. Men of good character and much intelligence.
G	Lower middle class. Shopkeepers and small employers, clerks and subordinate professionals.
H	Upper middle, servant-keeping class.

used on the maps to indicate that the street contains 'a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours'. This does not of course indicate that a street contained only one or two classes. It is rare to find entire streets, let alone districts, whose socio-economic structure is homogeneous. Even upper- and middle-class areas had their attendant mews and service quarters. Every Battersea street in Booth's notebooks contains at least two, and usually four or five classes, while the proportions in streets of the same map-colour vary widely. About 12% of Battersea streets containing 9% of households are mapped with two colours.

The correspondence between the seven colours and the eight classes is, unfortunately, not direct. Rosemary O'Day and David Englander produced a concordance (O'Day & Englander 1993, 47) (Table 3).

Booth divided employment into 40 sub-groups, based on actual employment (building, furniture, retail, transport, *etc*), also status in the workplace (casual labour, day labour, large employer, small employer) and gender.

This paper will now examine the evidence provided by Booth for Battersea in progressively more detail, beginning with an overview of the whole parish, then moving on to discuss the poorest, black and dark blue streets. It concludes with case studies of Battersea's two 'black' streets. Data from the Census enumerators' books for 1891 and 1901 are also used.

### BATTERSEA IN 1890

Suburban development in Battersea began in earnest after 1840, and by 1861 the

Table 3. Relationship between Booth's map colours and social classes

Class	Description	Map colour
A	Lowest class	Black
B	Casual earnings, very poor	Dark Blue
C	Intermittent earnings	Light Blue } Purple
D	Small regular earnings	
E	Regular standard earnings	Pink
F	Higher class labour	Pink
G	Lower middle class well-to-do	Red
H	Upper middle class, wealthy	Yellow

population was 19,600 (*cf* 3,365 in 1801). Thereafter it grew exponentially to 54,000 in 1871, 107,000 in 1881, and 149,500 in 1891. Battersea was surveyed independently by Graham Balfour (1858–1916; President of the Royal Statistical Society 1888–90, later a noted educationist) in 1888–9, using the methodology developed by Charles Booth in his initial survey of 1889 that covered only the East End. A summary of Balfour's investigation was published by Booth in 1892 (Booth 1892, vol 1, 277–85).

Balfour found small islands of significant poverty in a sea of modest comfort. His published account provides invaluable information about the methods of the enquiry (Booth 1892, vol 1, 283):

I had no close knowledge of the district, and have simply tried to record and compare the opinions of those who knew it best ... This enquiry was undertaken before Mr. Booth had decided to extend his investigations beyond East London, and I may say that the result of this independent trial of his method has convinced me of the great value of its general results. ... It is seldom easy to secure an extreme verdict on individual cases and the average of a street may be correctly given as B while at least half of its inhabitants would individually be allowed to pass into E. So that it is sometimes necessary to infer from the general to the particular.

Balfour's pen-picture captures Battersea as it neared its apogee.

Battersea [is] in some ways a special district, combining industries of its own ... with the most perfect specimen of a

working-class residential district in the "Shaftesbury Estate", where we seem to see realized the ideal of South London ....

Of the other extreme, the worse elements have for the most part taken refuge in blocks of houses isolated by blank walls or railway embankments, or untraversed by any thoroughfare. Some of the courts have long been notorious ... (e.g. Europa Place or "Little Hell") ... The isolated block at Nine Elms [is] the worst spot in the district.

Occasionally, however, a row of houses falls into bad repute, due merely to a few undesirable tenants who, if they are not ejected, render the neighbourhood too hot for any one with a taste for decency. In one such street [Orville Road, see below], built only three or four years ago on the grounds of a house which had long held out against all offers, the landlord has had to board up several houses in self-defence.

[I]t cannot be said that the very poor are badly housed in Battersea. In the most conspicuous cases, indeed, it is the tenants who have made the worst of their dwellings by removing every scrap of wood or iron that could be torn away ... Where a 100,000 people have had to be lodged within twenty years, jerry-building has not been unknown.

If "three removes" are still "as bad as a fire", then a fire can have but small terrors for many of these people. Two classes [are] always changing their abodes. The superior is restless but respectable ... The other's love of change is a mark of the worst streets, and is closely connected with arrears of rent ... [T]hese moves

are seldom further than three streets away, and a year or two will very probably witness the return of the exiles to within a few doors of one of their forsaken homes.

It is hard to fix a standard, but rents ... still bear a very large proportion to the earnings of the tenants, and there is no doubt that poverty drives families at first decent into the very worst streets for the sake of the rent, which is lowered by the character of the other tenants, who in turn live there for the privilege of behaving as they please.

There is certainly a good deal of true poverty in parts of Battersea ... Very much of it accompanied by drink (cause of misfortune or effect of despair). The irregular employment which is the lot of the building trades, among others, requires strict thrift in summer to avoid distress in winter.

The Balfour/Booth manuscript notebooks provide details of 389 Battersea streets, only 285 of which appear in the south-west corner of the 1889 poverty map. Table 4 details class allocations and map colouring. Although the coverage of streets is comprehensive, only 55–60% of households in the 1891 census are included. The notebooks often exclude

families in houses with multiple occupiers. In some cases, an individual's trade is noted, but no class assigned. For example, in Ingrave Street Balfour records class for 146 families and omits 54, compared with the 1891 census which has 245 heads of household, omitting only one.

The complex social mixing of classes reflected regularity of income, affordability of rents, family size and age of children, and factors such as drink. Class F ('highly-paid work') can be found even in the worst streets, where corner shop-keepers and publicans were essential service-providers, although generally they are found along the principal thoroughfares.

Long before 1890, Battersea had developed into a quintessentially skilled working-class suburb. In 1889, 70% of households lived in streets mapped in purple and pink, three-fifths of them assigned to Classes E and F. Nevertheless, 35% of households belonged to Classes A–D, and endured some degree of poverty. This is broadly in line with Booth's figure for London as a whole. In the 1891 census, 62% of household heads belong to Class III (skilled manual/non-manual), 12% were professionals/lower middle class, 17% semi-skilled, and 10% unskilled (Armstrong 1972, 191–310, includes a detailed account of Booth's use of census data).

Table 4. *Battersea 1889: street colour and class (%)*

Street type	No.	H'holds	Class							
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Black	1	49	6.1	34.7	38.8	10.2	8.2	2.0		
Blk/Dk Blue	7	325	2.1	21.2	36.9	19.7	15.7	4.0		
Dark Blue	9	374	1.3	18.7	36.9	18.4	20.3	4.3		
Blk/Lt Blue	3	103	1.9	16.5	43.7	14.6	19.4	3.9		
Light Blue	43	1838	0.4	10.9	38.4	21.9	25.6	2.7	0.1	
Purple	94	4255	0.1	5.2	21.1	18.6	45.1	8.9	0.9	0.1
Pink	168	6530	*	1.7	6.8	11.0	52.1	24.4	3.5	0.4
Pink/Red	35	949		0.4	2.5	2.7	23.2	38.9	29.1	3.2
Red	29	571		0.3		1.0	11.7	31.5	46.9	8.4
TOTAL	389	15051	0.2	4.7	15.9	14.3	41.4	17.3	5.4	0.7
Booth 1892			0.5	5.1	14.9	12.9	38.5	18.6	7.5	2.0

Notes: \* class present, but less than 0.1% of households; Booth 1892: Table of Sections and Classes on pp 284–5 of *Life & Labour of the People in London*, vol 1 (1892), based on the street surveys and other, unspecified sources by Graham Balfour.

The 1889 poverty map shows nine colours and combinations in Battersea, increasing to eleven in 1899. Between the two surveys, 67 streets had their colour changed (23.5%), of which 50 were downgraded and 17 upgraded. The great majority (58) involved the addition or subtraction of a second colour, or a change of one colour up or down. These alterations do not necessarily indicate changed social composition. Only six streets moved by two colour bands, four from pink to light blue, and two from dark blue to purple. Such changes underline the need to consider both maps, together with the supporting published material and archives.

### POVERTY IN BATTERSEA 1888–1899

The poorest streets in Battersea, coloured black and dark blue, or combinations of black with dark and light blue, numbered 18 in 1889 and 11 in 1899. The 1891 census data are summarised in Table 5, and those from

the poverty maps and Balfour's survey are in Table 6.

These streets account for 4.3% of Battersea's population. Household size differs little from the Battersea average, but overcrowding varied widely.

Although few in number, these streets could be as bad as any in late Victorian London. The causes of poverty were of course complex and changeable. Earnings were crucial, both absolutely and their regularity. Although rent was a key component in every budget, both Balfour and Booth comment on the frequency of non-payment. Large numbers of young children and babies could spell economic ruin for families, despite the high levels of infant and child mortality. In the poorest streets, children under 13 were often as numerous as those in work. Even the presence of several breadwinners in a family or sub-letting to lodgers and boarders did not provide immunity from the effects of unemployment and irregular, casual work.

Table 5. The lowest status streets in Battersea in the 1891 census

Street	Hos.	Pop'n	H'holds	Pers/Ho.	Pers/HH	III %	IV %	V %
Belfour St	36	344	67	9.56	5.13	17	10	74
Lit. Europa Pl	34	277	66	8.15	4.20	12	33	54
Orville Rd./Tce	43	678	110	15.76	6.16	25	27	48
Stockwood St	20	157	30	7.85	5.23	27	23	51
Wayland St	18	149	29	8.28	5.14	25	44	30
Seymour St	18	91	20	5.06	4.55	25	22	47
Woodgate St	36	388	73	10.78	5.32	41	28	31
Linford St	66	463	95	7.02	4.87	42	31	27
Ponton Rd	30	306	64	10.20	4.78	44	26	31
Ponton St	15	146	26	9.73	5.62	45	10	45
Currie St*	47	447	83	9.51	5.39	45	33	22
Latchmere Gro	147	857	152	5.83	5.64	45	17	38
Britannia Pl	36	236	45	6.56	5.24	51	31	17
Parkham St	42	438	87	10.43	5.03	33	42	25
John St	29	277	52	9.55	5.33	42	43	15
Granfield St	45	512	91	11.82	5.63	43	14	43
Brougham St	54	461	91	8.54	5.07	36	32	32
Berkley St	16	156	29	9.75	5.38	50	30	20
TOTAL	732	6883	1210	8.72	5.28			

Note: col 2 Occupied houses; cols 7–9 % heads of household in social class 3, 4, 5; \* 5% heads in Class 2 in 1891.

Table 6. *The lowest status streets in Battersea in Charles Booth's surveys*

Street	Colour		Class % [Households]							
	1889	1899	A	B	C	D	E	F	A-D	A-C
Belfour St	B	B	6	35	39	10	8	2	95	85
Lit. Europa Pl	B/DB	B/DB		41	43	14	2		98	84
Orville Rd/Tce	B/DB	B		36	44	15	6		94	79
Stockwood St	B/DB	B/DB	12	18	41	18	12		88	70
Wayland St	B/DB	B/DB	7	10	40	30	13		87	57
Seymour St	B/DB	LB	7	29	43	7	14		85	78
Woodgate St	B/DB	B/DB	6	23	32	22	16	1	83	61
Linford St	B/DB	LB		23	35	17	23	1	75	58
Ponton Rd	B/DB	B/DB	2	16	36	18	23	5	72	54
Ponton St	B/DB	B/DB	4	8	21	37	25	4	70	33
Currie St	B/DB	B/DB		8	40	22	19	11	70	48
Latchmere Gro	B/DB	B/DB		10	43	16	27	4	69	53
Britannia Pl	B/DB	B/DB	10	10	39	10	32		69	59
Parkham St	DB	Pu	2	22	34	18	22	2	76	58
John St	DB	LB		6	63	6	25		75	69
Granfield St	DB	Pu	2	7	29	26	26	10	74	48
Brougham St	B/LB	LB		20	40	18	15	6	79	61
Berkley St	B/LB	LB		5	57		38		62	62

## BELFOUR STREET

This enclave of five streets at Nine Elms was surrounded on all sides by railways and industry (Fig 1). Prominent among the latter was the London Gas-light Company's works. This was opened in 1858, and progressively expanded as demand for its products grew. By 1880, around 500 men were employed in the winter (Simmonds 1882, 16–23). The estate was laid out in 1863, and the 248 houses with a scattering of public houses and shops were complete by 1866.<sup>4</sup> By 1891, 2,000 people lived here. There were two schools, a Salvation Army Slum Post and an Anglican Mission Church. Booth commented on the large number of Irish Catholics, whose families comprised almost 25% of the population in 1891/1901 (Booth 1902, ser 3, vol 5, 150, 153, 196). They were served by St Bridget's Infants School in Belfour Street, while the redoubtable Charlotte Despard (1844–1939) used 2 Currie Street as

a residence-cum-youth centre, 'more social work than religious propaganda'. Booth considered the real problems locally as drink and associated violence, petty vandalism and borrowing from neighbours.

Booth coded all the streets black/dark blue, the largest such group in Battersea. In 1899, the area was 'poor and overcrowded, with many broken windows and filthy cracked plaster ... showing the usual signs of squalor in exaggerated form'. In the streets were dirty children, several bare-foot, and drink-sodden women. Booth's guide, Sergeant Nunn, reported that it was common to see small children naked, though they seemed well-fed and healthy. People often slept on mattresses in the street in hot weather to escape the vermin in the houses. Despite the high levels of 'flitting' to avoid the rent-collector, some families had lived here since the 1860s.<sup>5</sup> Some workers were relatively well paid, but frittered away money on drink and gambling. Gas-making in particular was

Table 7. *Belfour Street 1888–1911*

	1888	1891	1901	1911
Occupied Houses	26	36	35	34
Population	237	344	388	318
Households	49	67	76	65
People/House	9.1	9.6	11.1	9.4
People/Household	4.8	5.1	5.1	4.9
Employed	na	140	148	135
% Employed	na	40.7	38.1	42.5
Children 0–13	142	120	155	118
% Children	59.9	34.9	40.0	37.1
Lodgers/Boarders	na	27	12	4
Class EF	10.2	16.4	8.2	4.6
Class D	10.2	9.8	15.1	23.1
Class ABC	79.6	73.8	76.7	72.3

seasonal, with periods of unemployment or short-time. Balfour's data on Belfour Street and those from the 1891–1911 censuses are summarised in Table 7 above.

Although family size differed little from the Battersea average, overcrowding was a different matter, reaching up to 18 in four or five rooms. Each census showed about a quarter of the houses with 14 or more people. During the 1890s, the proportion of skilled workers declined sharply. They were replaced by the semi-skilled. Some 70–80% of workers were unskilled, while poverty levels exceeded 90%. Balfour noted that 1–7 Belfour Street were 'being done up' in 1888, perhaps a forlorn attempt to attract a better class of tenants; they were no different from the rest in 1891.

Balfour assigned 41% of household heads to Classes A and B [Very Poor], 49% to C and D [Poor], and 10% to E and F [Comfortable]. There were 27 'labourers', 9 of whom are categorised B2 (casual day-to-day labour), 12 C3 (irregular labour); of the five gas workers one was C, three E, and one F. The 1891 census has 11 'general labourers' and 15 gas workers, mostly stokers or labourers. Balfour's attributions appear to be based on the relatively high pay of gas stokers when in work, ignoring seasonal unemployment.

Balfour's marginal notes include 'respectable', 'intelligent', 'always poor', and 'very poor'. A dustman with six children lived in 'filthy conditions'; a widowed laundress received parish relief, while a 'broken down' iron moulder with a wife and two children earned only 2/2 a day. His final verdict on

Belfour Street is 'worst in block, but not as bad as Southampton Street [nearby, in Lambeth]. Rent used to be 10/- [per house], now reduced but never paid. Average earnings 23/-, but drink'.

#### ORVILLE ROAD (GROVE HOUSE ESTATE)

Grove House, built c.1690–1710, survived until 1884–5, having lost some land to the West London Extension Railway (1859–63). The estate was acquired by local solicitor Henry Corsellis (1856–1910), who developed Orville Road and Terrace.<sup>6</sup> The nine-roomed, three-storey houses were erected by various builders in 1885–86. Given the nature of housing demand in Victorian Battersea, it was inevitable that they would be subdivided, and most soon had a family on each floor. It was consistently home to 670–700 people. Worse still, Orville Road became an instant slum, whether because of inadequate covenants, or slack landlords.<sup>7</sup> Balfour visited the Grove House estate barely two years after the last houses were built. In 1889, Booth mapped it as dark blue and black, downgrading it to black in 1899 (Fig 2). There was a rapid turnover of tenants, many of them poorly-paid and with large families (Table 8).

Even by late 19th-century standards, Orville Road was extremely overcrowded, with an average of 15–18 per house, ranging from 3 to 28. While some families occupied a whole floor, others lived four or more to the room. In 1901 Nos 20–28 were empty, but the landlord

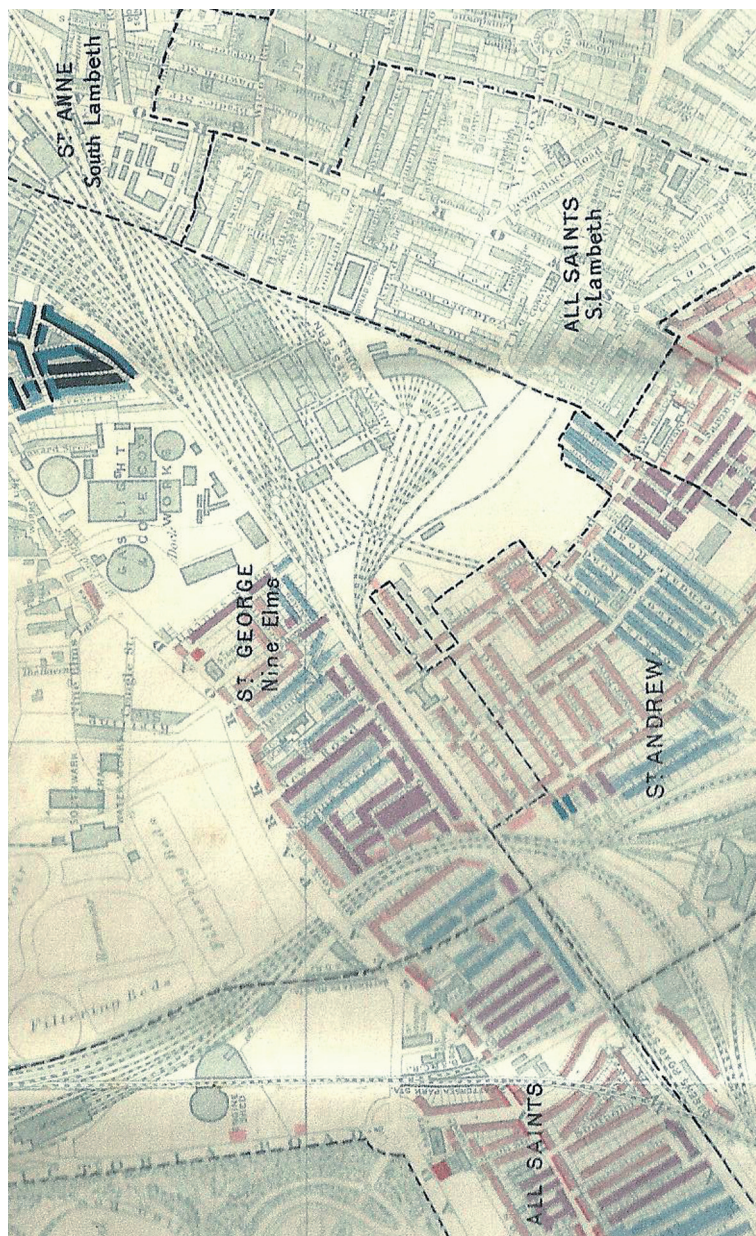


Fig 1. Battersea 1899 including Belfour Street (top right) (From C Booth Life and Labour of the People in London. Religious Influences)





Table 8. *Orville Road 1888–1911*

	1888	1891	1901	1911
Occupied Houses	43	43	38	41
Population	540	678	676	705
Households	93	110	111	114
People/House	12.6	15.8	17.8	17.2
People/Household	5.8	6.2	6.1	6.2
Employed Total	111	180	230	280
% Employed	20.6	26.6	34.0	39.7
Children 0–13	336	332	317	300
% Children	62.2	49.0	46.9	42.6
Lodgers/Boarders	na	21	10	43
Class EF	12.8	43.9	24.3	17.5
Class D	14.0	15.0	29.9	18.4
Class ABC	73.2	41.1	45.8	64.4

was holding out for better tenants; his reward was the worst overcrowding in 1911. By then 6 Orville Road was a common lodging house, home to 15 single men, while the principal tenant at No. 27 had eight lodgers.

Overcrowding did not necessarily mean large families. As at Belfour Street, household size was close to the Battersea average. Although the proportion in work increased from 27% in 1891 to 40% in 1911, this was not matched by greater comfort or prosperity, but a rapid decline in social status. Between 1891 and 1911, the proportion of skilled working-class household heads declined from 44% to 15%, while the unskilled increased from 41% to 64%. Balfour assigned 94% to Classes B, C and D, compared with only 56% in Classes 3 and 4 in 1891, highlighting the problems of assigning social class solely by occupation, without reference to factors such as earnings, unemployment, and family size and age.

The classification problem obviously exer-

cised Balfour and Booth. Balfour's notes contain many changes to social class categories, made in a different hand. Compared with the census, it appears that many families were omitted. 53 of the 93 households in the notebook had their class changed, 49 of them downwards. Of the 86 that were classified, the original allocation to class was 1A, 4B, 40C, 14D, and 27E. This was revised to 29B, 34C, 12D, and 11E. The principal changes were C to B (20) and E to C (18), which had the effect of reducing those assessed above the poverty line. The original allocations had 53% in Classes A–C, 16% in D, and 31% in E/F. Although skilled workmen still lived in Orville Road c.1890, their position was precarious, and more accurately reflected by Booth than the census.

Balfour's marginal comments on Orville Road residents tail off before he reaches the even numbers and Orville Terrace. Here is a summary:

No.	Occupation	Family	Comment	Class*
1	General shop	2	takes rents	nil
5	Butcher	6	wretched, drinks, gambles	D>C
7	Labourer	8	dreadful, filthy	C>B
9	Compositor	7	decent	E>C
11	Traveller, Egg & Butter Merchant	8	drank frightfully	E>C
15	Publican	7	keeps large pub Chelsea	E
17	Carpenter	5	insolent; wife not bad	C
41	Schoolmaster	7	retired, prob. disgraced	E>C>B

Note: \* indicates change of class

Further detailed and trenchant remarks were collected by Booth in an interview with Mrs Isabella Gilmore (1842–1923), Head of the Rochester Diocesan Deaconess Institution, on 4 November 1890.<sup>8</sup> She repeatedly referred to the filthy condition of the street, '[T]he houses swarm with vermin and the bodies of many of the people also'. According to her, the houses '[W]ere built about 5 years ago, each consists of 3 floors [each has] two rooms and a small room at the back, each floor forming a distinct tenement'. When she came in 1886, however, there were a good many fairly decent people and the houses were respectable. Soon, '2 or 3 bad lots got in on the odd numbers side & then the street changed as if by magic: the better folk left & people came who had hardly any furniture'. 'In some houses, the banisters have gone (probably for firewood), and even stoves have been removed.'

There follow detailed accounts of Nos 1–17, 27/29, although not all families are covered. Often, the tenant is named, enabling a cross-check with the 1891 census. Although the interval was less than six months, only 9 of the 20 tenants named were at the same address. Booth says that the west side, furthest from the High Street, was much more respectable than the rest. 'It used to be very bad but was cleared & for a time all the lower windows were boarded up. It has a different owner from the other part & he had kept it empty until he could get better tenants.'

Here is a selection of Mrs Gilmore's vivid accounts. They may be biased towards the lowest end of the spectrum, though the census shows little variation in the degree of deprivation across the estate.

No. 7. Top Floor. Front Room. Widow, a scrubber at the Infirmary. There were six children living with her a short time ago, the eldest son being 16. The C[harity] O[rganisation] S[ociety] got him away and also another boy into the Gordon Home [for boys, at Croydon]. The girl (age 15) into service. One boy earns 6/- or 7/- a week & this is all she has beside her own earnings.

Back Room Fletcher. Man, wife & three children. Came from Vauxhall. Man always out of work. Children sickly & miserable. Got a boy to sea so there are only 2 children at home now. Very poor.

First Floor Bond. Dreadfully dirty and very rough. Man is a labourer, in and out. Has a bad leg. ... Have 7 or 8 children. All come to ragged school.

Ground Floor Wilson. Coal porter & wife. Elderly couple. Had women lodging with them who were prostitutes. Formerly there was a large family here.

No. 15. Top Floor Leslie. Man a casual labourer. Wife, dirty, shiftless & "covered with lice". 6 children, eldest a boy about 12, a very bad boy. Man supposed to have fits, epileptic, probably caused by drink. Man & wife drink.

First Floor Wyatt and wife. Eight children, two at service. Old man is put down as a labourer but he has had thousands. When she first knew him he owned a public house in Chelsea. Two years ago in a most awful state thro' drink. He has not drunk much since and for a time kept the pledges. Never gets any work but is kept by relatives. Wife still drinks.

Ground Floor Chamberlain. Widow with 3 child<sup>n</sup> at home. Never see the woman, who goes out nursing and is only home on Sundays. Only sees a big girl. Suppose it is a "bad" case. Have been here six weeks.

No. 27 [Ground Floor] Keetch. Man is a bricklayer, always in work and is steady. Wife, clean and respectable. 5 children, the eldest a boy was a scholar at Sir Walter St. John's School, but is now working at a factory at Merton. There is a baby. The home is comfortable, & they have decent food, children say grace before meals. They have the whole house and have had one or two troubles with lodgers. Landlord lets them keep the house empty until they can get respectable lodgers.

Top Floor Morton. Composer. Wife is untidy but tries hard to keep things going. 4 children. Had an old woman with them. Respectable.

First Floor. [S]everal people in and out; last was name of Stevens.

That crucial Victorian word 'respectable' played a key role in the perceptions of both Mrs Gilmore and Charles Booth. The concern of the Keech family to ensure they had decent sub-tenants shows how difficult it could be to maintain status.

In Booth's published work, Orville Road appears under the pseudonym *Burdock Road*, and the account shows how Booth modified the Gilmore interview for public consumption (Booth 1892, vol 2, 86–7).

A few years ago Burdock House and its garden became, in the hands of a local speculator, the "Burdock Estate", and was sold at a stiff ground rent to a builder who covered it with houses for the working classes, of that cheap description which gives the most immediate return in rent ... Each house in this street consists of three floors, and each floor is a separate tenement, consisting of two rooms to the front and a small one at the back.

(The following paragraph is a close paraphrase of Mrs Gilmore's remarks about the social decline, the lack of furniture, removal of fixtures and vermin.)

Developer Henry Corsellis did indeed operate a policy of high ground rents on all his estates, here £7–£7/10/- per house. In fact, half a dozen builders were involved, several of them substantial men active elsewhere in Battersea. The evidence of the survivors (Orville Terrace in Vicarage Crescent) suggests that they were far from jerry-built.

Only the accounts of Nos 1–9 appear in print, generally verbatim, but arranged in tabular form and including social class. Names are omitted. For example, No. 7 reads:

Floor	Rms	No.	Class	Family	Comment
ground	3	2	C	Elderly couple	Coal porter. Had prostitute lodging with them.
first	3	9	B	Man, wife, 7–8 children	Labourer. In irregular work. Has a bad leg. Children at ragged school. Very rough and dirty family.
second	2	4	D	Widow and 3 children	Scrubber at infirmary. Three older children have been found places away. One earns 6s or 7s.
second	1	4	B	Man, wife and 2 children	Labourer. Always out of work. Children are sickly and miserable. One boy got to sea.

In 1889, Graham Balfour found three families at 7 Orville Road, each occupying three rooms: a widow with three children (B); a labourer with one child (C, altered to D), and a labourer with six children (C, altered to B).<sup>9</sup> The Bond and Fletcher families appear in the 1891 census, the latter with four lodgers, Frances Chatten and her children.

Databases available on-line, including censuses, registration and other data, make it possible to track the movements of some of these families. James Bond, Henry Bruckland, James Sullivan, James Leslie, and, in the 'better' part the Keech brothers and John Morten have been selected to show what can be gleaned.

In 1891, labourer James Bond (52) lived at 7 Orville Road with his wife Emma and seven children, ranging from a few months to nine years and all born in Battersea. Booth comments on his irregular work, and Bond must have struggled to raise his large family. They were at No. 13 in 1901, still with seven children at home, five of them working, as was their mother. Occupations included charwoman, box-maker, van guard and railway porter, none especially well-paid, but making the Bonds considerably better off than in 1891. James Bond died in 1902, and by 1911 Emma and three of her children lived in two rooms at 2 Durham Buildings York Road, an L.C.C. tenement block built in 1902.

General labourer Henry Bruckland, his wife and six children, aged one to ten, occupied three rooms at 5 Orville Road in 1891. He was 29 and irregularly employed. Three more children followed between 1891 and 1896. The family were typically peripatetic, with at least five addresses in Battersea and three in Chelsea between 1871 and 1911. From Orville Road, the Brucklands moved

up in the world, to Grant Road and Falcon Grove, both 'purple' streets.

In 1891, compositor James Sullivan (45) occupied the first floor at 9 Orville Road with his wife and five children, described by Booth as 'exceedingly dirty but decent people'. All were born in Soho and lived there until at least 1884. The eldest daughter was in service, and James (16) was an

apprentice compositor. Balfour classed them as E, changed to C; there is no mention of drink or unemployment. In 1901 Sullivan, whose wife had died in 1900, lived at 5 Geddes Road Wandsworth (pink), with four children, one employed at a starch factory, another at a hosier's. In 1911, James was at 13 Denton Street Wandsworth (1897; not on Booth map), still working as a compositor.

Booth only mentions Keetch and Morton (*sic*) at 27 Orville Road in the 'better' part. The former, a bricklayer, always in work and 'steady', with a wife and five children (four in 1891). Morton, a 'respectable' compositor, occupied the top floor with his wife and four children. In 1891 there were *two* Keech families, headed by brothers George (42) and Amos (29), both bricklayers. George arrived in south London *c.*1880. By 1901, he had abandoned Orville Road for Marney Road off Clapham Common (pink).

Amos Keech eventually had nine children. Like his brother he did not linger in Orville Road, though remaining in north Battersea, successively in Trott Street, Ashtons Buildings, Frances Street (all purple), and Westbridge Road (pink). After a brief stay in Matthews Street, on the pioneering municipal Latchmere Estate, he moved to Elsley Road (pink) on the Shaftesbury Park estate, a well-known bastion of skilled working-class respectability and Balfour's 'ideal of South London'. After 1914 Amos Keech moved to 13 Meteor Street (pink), where he died in 1950.

Compositor John David Morten (32) lived at 27 Orville Road in 1891 with his wife and two young children (Booth says four), a tally that grew to seven. They too escaped the slum by 1895, living in Earlsfield, West Norwood and Brockley, and by the late 1920s at West Ealing. Although it seems to have been relatively easy for skilled workmen in steady employment to escape the poverty trap of Orville Road, for the majority there was no way out, and life remained a continual struggle to make ends meet, often involving short-distance moves.

Booth revisited Orville Road in July 1899, accompanied by PC Edwards.<sup>10</sup> As a result, he changed Orville Terrace to 'black'. He noted that this was 'by far the worst place in the sub-division, with thieves, prostitutes, lodgers and loafers'. This seems rather hard on respectable lodgers, and it is naturally

impossible to identify any prostitutes in the 1901 census. The north-south section was the worst, with all the usual signs of squalor. 'Several children with naked feet ... Dark blue barred as on [1889] map, or black as Edwards says it gets steadily worse ... But in this den are some decent families, especially in two houses: [asked why they came here], Edwards said that the men had large families and came in despair of getting rooms elsewhere.' As we have seen even the skilled workmen who lived in Orville Road did tend to have larger-than-average families, and while this could be a potent factor in creating poverty, it was not necessarily an irreversible one, as children grew up and went to work.

## CONCLUSION

Two things emerge clearly from this study of late Victorian Battersea. The first is that Booth's *Descriptive Maps of Poverty* compress a multitude of facts, figures and impressions into a structured statistical framework. To get beyond this visual impression, one must read not only the relevant parts of the 17 volumes published between 1892 and 1903, but also quarry the vast archive of notebooks and other information. These include not only interviews with individuals who had first-hand knowledge of the streets and the poor of London, but also notes made by Charles Booth and his fellow investigators as they walked the streets and visited the houses, providing details of occupations, family size, living conditions, rents and much more.

Booth may have laid down the overarching methodology, but the ideas and perceptions of those conducting the field-work inevitably introduced a degree of subjectivity. Thus, many class attributions made by Graham Balfour during his work on Battersea were subsequently changed. Equally important are the comments made about the people and the way they lived. The spread of compulsory schooling after 1870 meant that the many children in places like Belfour Street and Orville Road made little economic contribution, while still needing to be housed and fed. The notebooks show that many parents struggled in impossible circumstances, not least as a result of the death of one partner.

This paper has only touched upon the

evidence for the 'worst' streets in one London suburb. The Booth surveys, together with the Census and other archives, together provide a vast amount of material for local historians, studying streets across a variety of suburbs (Steele 1997). The Open University/BBC project *Secret History of Our Streets* of 2012 showed how much there is to uncover about the Victorian city. Perhaps the LAMAS Local History Committee could develop a collaborative project by local societies in Inner London?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Booth Archive forms part of the British Library of Political & Economic Science at the London School of Economics. A detailed index is available on-line at <http://booth.lse.ac.uk>.

<sup>2</sup> For the methodology behind the maps see Booth 1892, vol 2, ch 3 and appendix 'Classification and Description of Population 1888–9 by School Board Block and Division, Battersea' on pp 42–4.

<sup>3</sup> O'Day & Englander 1993, 193, 216 provide details of the complex publication history. For details of the map colours and class descriptions see <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/static/a/4.html> (accessed 25 August 2012).

<sup>4</sup> MBW Minutes 13 Nov 1863, London Metropolitan Archives, application by Henry Nixon of Lambeth, builder; completed estate on OS 25-inch Plan LIV surveyed 1866; Belfour Street named after Edmund Belfour (1789–1865), long-serving Secretary of the Royal College of Surgeons.

<sup>5</sup> Booth Archive, B366, 65–7. Walk round Nine Elms on 28 June 1899 with Sgt. Nunn.

<sup>6</sup> MBW Minutes 1 Aug 1884, LMA, application by Joseph Lewry, builder of Battersea; for house building and builders see District Surveyor's Returns LMA MBW/1735, 1744 and 1753.

<sup>7</sup> Booth Archive, B59, 72 and 366; C Booth *Life and Labour* vol 2 (1892), 86–7.

<sup>8</sup> Booth Archive B72, 198–205. Isabella Gilmore was William Morris's sister, trained as a nurse, and head deaconess 1877–1906. Booth described her as 'well-made, tall ... quick in her speech and actions and evidently very sympathetic'. She had read the East London volume and offered to give Booth general particulars of Battersea, where she had worked for four years. Booth Archive B72, 198–205.

<sup>9</sup> Booth Archive, B59, 67–71.

<sup>10</sup> Booth Archive, B366, 169–171.

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