

# **Housing the Workers in London**

## **Housing Legislation 1850-1914**

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### **London's Demographics in the 1800s**

# 1. The Demographics of London of the period

London in the late 1800's was the largest city in the world but was soon to be overtaken by New York. Most people assume that London was always the biggest and most populous of cities, but as the graphs below show London was not the most populous city in terms of people per square mile.

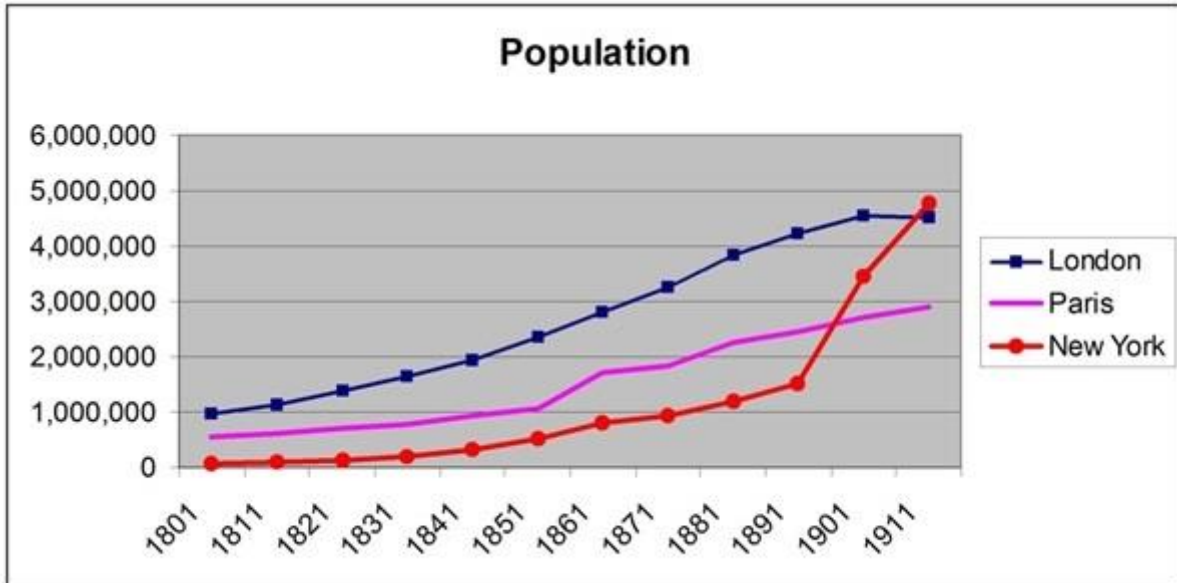


Table 1: Population comparison for London, Paris and New York

The figures for the graph in Table 1 are taken from the census returns of the time and show that London was the largest city, in terms of population, until 1911<sup>1</sup>. The sudden rise in the New York population from 1891 is both a result of massive immigration and an expansion of the city boundaries that included some areas previously outside the city jurisdiction. In area, London was 188 sq. miles, Paris only 40 sq. miles but New York was 304.8 sq. miles.

Many people assume that London had the highest density of population in Europe. The graph in Table 2 below shows that Paris always had a higher density of population than London for the period concerned.

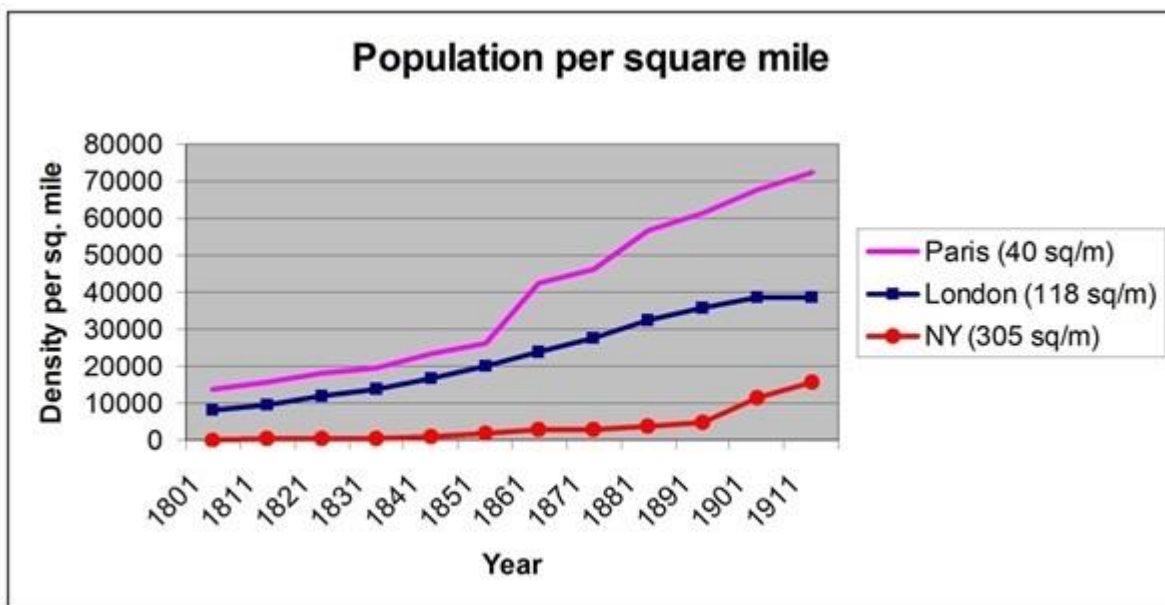


Table 2: Population density comparison for London, Paris and New York

As can be seen from the above tables, making assumptions can be dangerous when the statistics show otherwise. This paper concerns the problems of London and it is for others to analyse the problems of Paris, New York, or any other city.

Most of the working classes were very keen to live near their workplace rather than live in the more open outskirts of the city and travel in. Much of this can be explained by the need to hold on to regular employment, or be first in the queue for casual employment. Even the cost of travelling on cheap trams or workman’s trains could represent a significant proportion of an unskilled workman’s weekly wage. The graph in Fig. 1 gives the population per acre for the London boroughs on their formation in 1899 (as seen in Fig. 2). The figures have been collated from statistics taken in 1899 for the earlier Sanitary Districts. Although not every Sanitary District was entirely absorbed into a single borough, the vast majority were and the graph gives an accurate guide as to the highest densities of population.

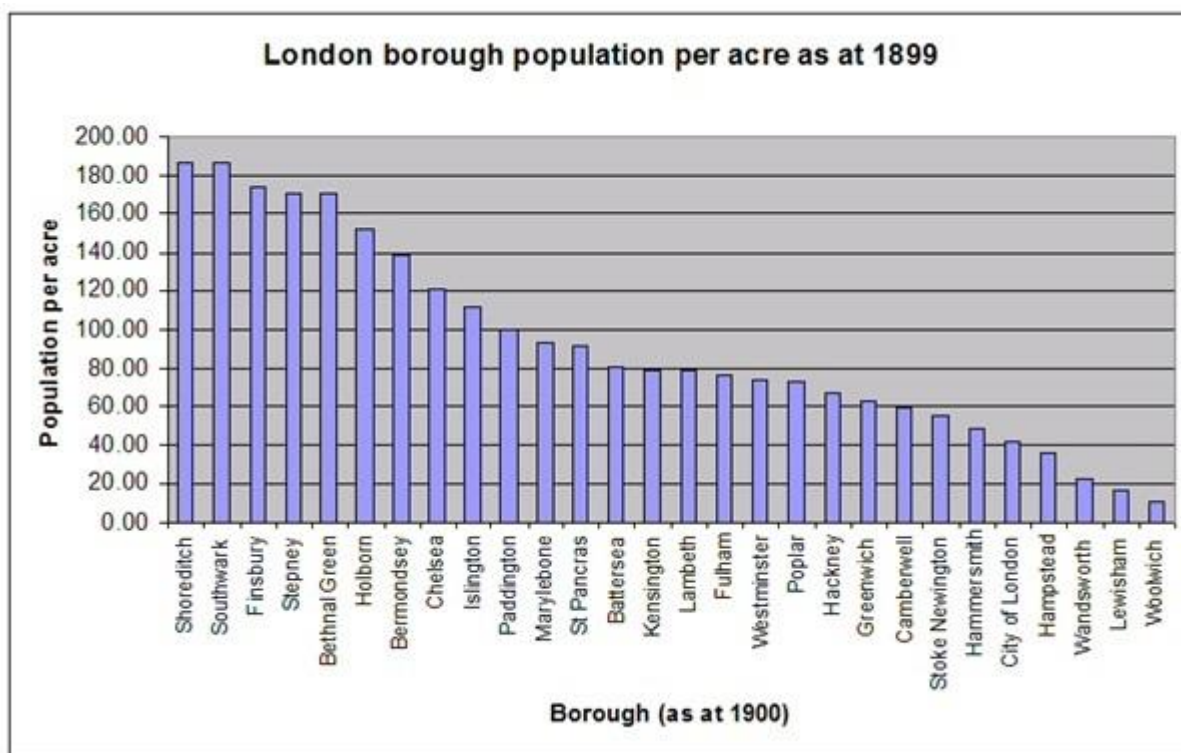


Fig. 1: London borough populations as at 1899 <sup>2</sup>



## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The first four UK National census returns for 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831 were destroyed by the Government once the statistics had been compiled and so most people assume that the 1841 census was the first

<sup>2</sup> LCC; Sanitary District Population Statistics; LMA ref: LCC/PH/GEN/03/003

<sup>3</sup> Handy-Volume Atlas of the County of London; Phillips; 1922. Note that some minor re-alignment of boundaries between boroughs had taken place between 1900 and 1922, but the county boundary remained the same. Those boroughs mostly affected by re-alignment were Wandsworth, Battersea, Lambeth and Chelsea.

<sup>4</sup> "Life and Labour in London"; Charles Booth; 1889; vol 1 page 33, "Poverty"

<sup>5</sup> "First Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Enquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes"; 1885; pp16-17

<sup>6</sup> The term "cottage" at this time referred to any small dwelling that was 1 or 2 storeyed and often without a garden (although could have a small yard). It was used to differentiate the dwelling from the larger "house" and the definitely grander "villa". Today, the typical inner city "cottage" of the Victorian times would be called a terraced house and would usually have a front door that opened onto a street or court.