



Public Libraries of Greater London

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TO MOST CITIZENS, any city means a place or a unit which is distinguished from other cities and from its surrounding area by a name. To one associated with city government, the city is often not a unit at all, but a cluster of units which are haphazardly assembled and associated mainly by contiguity and the exigencies of transport and distinguished from its surrounding area only by a gradual shading downwards of population density. The larger the city, the more likely this is to be true. The point is well expressed by Harold Hamill:

Let us imagine that we are high in a jet plane flying over any one of our metropolitan areas . . . below us . . . lies a vast and beautiful city. . . . At least it *seems* to be one vast city. . . . We know the spectacular falseness of this picture of unity. We know that we are looking down not on one, or even only five or ten governmental units, but many scores.¹

It is natural, if annoying, that this should be so. The city is not a cell growing outwards; it is an accretion of cells, each of them growing around a nucleus. As the city grows, it engulfs already existing communities, which in their turn tend to grow outward, and at the same time try to retain their identity as units. It has never proved possible to forecast a city's rate of growth or its eventual boundaries. Even the "planned" cities of the twentieth century have shown this. Delhi, for example, trebled its population from 600,000 to nearly two million in less than ten years after 1945.

Alongside this constant and chaotic growth, there is a struggle by

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government agencies to control, integrate, and reorganize. Hamill again well summarized the situation:

Citizen commissions, university bureaus of government, research organizations, regional planners—all have been hard at work to devise new patterns of organization which may begin to control the monster we know as the metropolis. But these efforts continue to meet frustration as average citizens, and all too often their officials, go about their day-to-day business, bitterly complaining about high taxes with inadequate public service, doggedly clinging to a blind trust in the glories of local government, unaware and unwilling to be told that there is a logical and direct relationship between governmental organization and governmental achievement.²

The public library services are small in the general context of local government, but being peculiarly local, they probably suffer as much or more than other services, particularly in a country where there is a central government with overriding powers over local government. In Great Britain, for instance, the central government has clearly defined powers in respect to education, public health, police, fire services, public utilities, and transport. It has used those powers very effectively in imposing standards and reducing the number of authorities with responsibility for them. Electricity and gas supply have been reorganized on a national basis, many authorities have lost their educational and public health responsibilities, and only the larger authorities are now responsible for police and fire prevention.

In fact, a quiet but none the less effective revolution has been going on in local government in Great Britain since 1945, and it is only now beginning to be possible to judge it in perspective, and realize how ruthlessly it has been carried out. In such a situation, public libraries have a low priority. But unexpectedly, reform has begun, and London, in particular, is affected by two important pieces of legislation.

In April 1965, the new Public Libraries Act came into operation and placed public libraries under the general control of the Ministry of Education and Science.³ The Act gave that Ministry sweeping powers to impose standards. It gave the Ministry the power to abolish library authorities below 40,000 population, and it states for the first time, in the 110 years of public library service in Great Britain, that local authorities have a statutory duty to provide an efficient library service. At the same time, the new London Government Act has come into full operation.⁴ This cuts completely through the accretion of local government areas, and creates a new Greater London.

These two Acts of Parliament, one specifically relating to public libraries, the other radically changing the local government of one of the world's largest metropolitan areas, completely change the picture of the public library services of London. Taken together, they may well constitute a revolution. Nor is that the whole story. Among the powers given to the Ministry of Education and Science under the new Public Libraries Act, is the power to create Regional Councils, composed of representatives of local authorities, for cooperation between libraries—cooperation which, under the terms of the Act, need not be confined to public libraries.

Historical Developments

Before examining the nature and possibilities of these radical changes in local government structure and public library responsibilities, it is necessary to look closely at the past, and at the complex nature of local government in London, which has greatly affected the development of its public libraries. The pattern of public library provision in many conurbations is that of a very large public library system at the center of the original or enlarged city, surrounded by a number of smaller systems, serving urban populations, and finally semi-rural systems. This is not, and never has been, the situation in London.

When the first Public Libraries Act was passed in 1850, metropolitan London was divided into sixty-seven parishes, each of which could adopt the Act and start a public library service. Very few did so. The first was a parish in Westminster in 1856, and it was twenty-five years before any other parish followed this example. London was behind the rest of the country. One can only conjecture that the parishes were too small to think of themselves as effective library units, and this view is reinforced by the fact that when London government was reformed in 1900, amalgamating the sixty-seven parishes into twenty-nine areas, of which twenty-eight were called metropolitan boroughs and one was the city of London, adoption was rapid, and by 1920 all the metropolitan boroughs had public libraries. The city of London was unique in that it provided only a reference library.

From 1900 to 1965, therefore, these twenty-eight boroughs and the city of London have been the basis for public library service in central London. No one could say that they are ideal areas either for library or any other local government purposes. They varied greatly in size, population, and taxable value. Some of the poorer East End boroughs, such as Stepney, Poplar, and Bethnal Green, had populations of under

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100,000; others in the central area had even smaller resident populations but were very wealthy indeed. The city of London, probably one of the richest square miles in the world, had a resident population of less than 5,000, while Holborn, another immensely wealthy borough, had a resident population of only 21,000. Outside the central area were the favored residential districts of Hampstead and Chelsea, and the semi-suburban boroughs such as Wandsworth and Hammersmith. Wandsworth, the largest of the metropolitan boroughs at the time of the London Government Act, had a population of nearly 350,000.

It did not necessarily follow, however, that the boroughs best financially able to provide public library service were the most eager to do so. The East End boroughs made great efforts to provide public libraries for their working-class populations, while the wealthier Central and West End boroughs neglected their opportunities. Possibly the central areas took the view that their resident populations were small, and their daytime populations could use the facilities in their home suburbs. The boroughs in the West End, such as Marylebone (the last of the London boroughs to adopt the Libraries Acts), probably assumed that the majority of their residents preferred to use other facilities, such as subscription libraries, for their reading.

In view of the enormous differences in political control, financial viability, and population, and lacking any central direction, the surprising thing is that from about 1930 onwards there was a gradual leveling of the standard of service provided, so much so that in 1949, J. D. Stewart could say: "The position, therefore, is that while London lacks the superlative *central* municipal library service given in a few comparable areas, the level of the service given over the whole area, and especially in those parts at a distance from the centre, is very much higher in London than it is anywhere else."⁵

Stewart gave some figures of the position as it then was. The population of metropolitan London was about 3,200,000. There were 124 public library buildings with a stock of about 4,000,000 volumes. Total issue of books was about 25 million annually, with a total expenditure of £672,416.⁶

Stewart's words may be taken as a piece of special pleading, since it is obvious that the fragmentation of central London into a number of independent authorities was not the perfect method of providing a public library service. But it is nevertheless true, and most public librarians in England would agree, that in the last thirty years, enormous progress has been made in London, and the London bor-

oughs have led the country in expenditure per head of population, in experiments with new techniques and elimination of routines, and in close and fruitful cooperation with each other to eliminate the problems of local government boundaries.

Steps in Library Cooperation

This has been achieved by using statutory opportunities to the full, and by sinking local prejudices for the benefit of the whole. The history of cooperation between the London boroughs shows how an unpromising situation can be transformed with a sensible approach. In 1929, the London Union Catalogue was started, with the assistance of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (CUKT). This was a union catalogue of the holdings of all the metropolitan libraries, freely available for loan or consultation. In 1934, the CUKT withdrew, and it became necessary to transfer the financial responsibility to the constituent libraries. The obvious body to take general control was an organization known as the Standing Joint Committee of Metropolitan Boroughs, which had a semi-statutory function. To take over the responsibility the Standing Joint Committee created a Libraries Committee and an Advisory Body of Librarians, and this in turn was elected by another informal organization, the Association of Metropolitan Chief Librarians, from its own members. The Advisory Body, existing between the Association and the Standing Joint Committee, and with the specific job of maintaining the London Union Catalogue, found itself in a strong position to make suitable recommendations for further cooperation, and it has taken full advantage of this.⁷

The first step was inter-availability of tickets, whereby any library user in the metropolitan area could use any library in the system. Over half-a-million people now avail themselves of this. The growing use of interlibrary loans through the London Union Catalogue drew attention to the problem of retention of older books and the need for insuring that at least one copy of every new book was purchased. The first step was the creation of a joint fiction reserve, to insure that somewhere in the metropolitan area copies of all fiction likely to be required by the student of literature would always be available. The next move was the introduction of subject specialization. Under this, each authority agreed to make additional financial provision for special collections, and to maintain them. The whole field of knowledge is now covered in this way, although only British books are at present required pur-

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chases. Other matters, such as uniformity of opening hours, and standardization of rules and regulations, have also been established.

The special collections now number nearly 400,000 books; the fiction reserve has 85,000. A playset collection has been jointly built up comprising nearly 3,000 sets. Another cooperative scheme has developed collections of fiction in most foreign languages, available to the polyglot population of London. Nearly 30,000 books are loaned through the London Union Catalogue.

Although the libraries of metropolitan London are far from being an integrated service, it will be seen that a good deal has been achieved. It must be emphasized that the avenue for cooperation that has been used was the only one available. The combination of voluntary effort supported by a semi-statutory body with no powers beyond those of persuasion is unusual. It is also a fact that the Advisory Body of Librarians, created almost by chance through the needs of the London Union Catalogue, has had a unique opportunity. Not all local government officers have such an organization and similar access to the Standing Committee. It is true that there is an over-all statutory organization for the area in the London County Council, but this has no function for libraries. As the Educational Authority for London, however, it has provided school libraries. The service provided in schools has been good, but it is unfortunate that there has been no avenue of cooperation except at a very local level.

All the metropolitan boroughs provide reference libraries according to the needs of their areas. The central areas (Holborn, Westminster, and the city of London) provide services for their daytime populations, both in commercial, technical, and general collections. But singly, they do not have the resources one expects in a metropolis. It is true that there are a great many non-public libraries in central London which to some extent make up the deficiency. Some of these, such as the British Museum Library, the Science Library in South Kensington, and the Patent Office Library, are world famous, but access to these libraries is usually limited to the advanced scholar or research worker, and opening hours are restricted. There is a need for larger reference libraries than can at present be provided by boroughs individually, and a plan has been drawn for the provision of seven large reference libraries situated at suitable points. So far, no progress has been made on this plan, except that, by agreement, some of the libraries concerned have begun to build their collections.

Libraries Outside Metropolitan London

So much for the metropolitan area. But this is an area containing only about three and a half million people, out of the nine million comprising what is loosely known as Greater London. Greater London is usually defined as the area within fifteen miles' radius of Charing Cross, and from a local government point of view it was chaotic, containing parts of six counties, over forty boroughs or county boroughs, and twenty-three urban districts. Not all of these are library authorities, since under the Act of 1919, county councils assumed library powers for those areas within their boundaries not already library authorities. Many urban areas have developed since then, but have been content to leave library provision to the counties. This has resulted in some odd situations, but has enabled library development to be planned more effectively than would have been the case if all independent authorities had started their own library services. The county of Middlesex, for instance, has become almost entirely urban, and has built a public library service for over 600,000 people, nearly three-quarters of the population of the county.

Cooperation between libraries in such a situation has been extremely difficult. There is no general common agency, however limited in powers, such as there is in central London. In fact, for purposes of cooperation, the area has been from the 1920's part of the South Eastern Regional Library Bureau.⁸ This system covers some ninety library authorities of southeastern England, and its interlending system facilitates the loan of nearly 100,000 volumes a year. It has developed along similar lines to the London Union Catalogue, with a subject specialization scheme which insures that at least one copy of every book published in Great Britain is purchased and retained.

Although the two systems are separate—they have their headquarters in the National Central Library—the two catalogs are side by side, and naturally there is very close cooperation between them and with the National Central Library. For various reasons, however, the two systems have not yet been integrated. The overriding reason is that the London Union Catalogue and the special collections schemes of the metropolitan boroughs are available to any reader for the cost of a bus fare. It is possible for the user of one library to inspect personally the special collection in which he is interested at another library; it is not so possible, for instance, for a reader at Brighton to see a special collection at Luton. The South-Eastern System therefore has to depend entirely on postal loan. Another reason is that the Advisory Body has

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a semi-statutory standing, and a unity which, however precarious, is not easily sacrificed. The Executive Committee of the South-Eastern Region has not. It is a voluntary organization raising its funds by levy on the constituent authorities, but it has no powers beyond those of cooperative access to bookstocks. It cannot, for instance, advise on, much less enforce, any proposals for the inter-availability of tickets.

The picture, then, of the London public libraries up to the present time is one of a great number of rather small library authorities, spending on their libraries at a rather higher level than the country as a whole, but very uneven in population and financial power. A dual pattern of cooperation has been superimposed, largely on a voluntary basis. A great deal has been achieved by this, but the inherent defects of such a conglomeration of authorities cannot be eliminated in this way. Some of the more urgent problems are caused by what might be called accidental defects. Since the Central London boroughs are not educational authorities, there is a divorce from formal education, and since the cooperative organization for both central London and the South-East Region is entirely a public library organization, there is a divorce from the academic libraries, and no common ground for discussion of joint problems.

Changes in Education in England

This has caused increasing difficulties in view of the recent changes in the kind of demand the public libraries are experiencing. One of the most important phenomena in the field of English education in recent years has been the tremendous increase in the number of young people proceeding from grammar, or secondary schools, to various forms of higher education: universities, technical colleges, and teachers' training colleges. It is a development which is continuing, even accelerating, and London libraries are feeling the impact of it on stock and on accommodation.

The effect on book stocks makes itself felt in the tremendous growth in the demand for standard university textbooks. University libraries are quite unable to meet the simultaneous demand from large numbers of students for books recommended by tutors, and this demand is therefore transferred to public libraries. The normal loan period is insufficient for the student who wants to keep the book for a whole term, or longer. With other students clamoring for all available copies, the public library cannot allow repeated renewals; and the inevitable result is that many textbooks are "borrowed" from the library without

the formality of the charging process. Some of these books reappear on the shelves after lengthy absences, but many do not, and the continual replacement of missing textbooks is becoming a problem.

One London library, Finsbury, has attempted to meet this demand for textbooks in a systematic manner. Recommended textbooks are duplicated heavily and issued to local students for indefinite periods. If a request from a student cannot be met, another copy of the book is specially purchased. But other London librarians feel that the supply of textbooks, on this scale, is primarily the responsibility of the universities, and that it should not properly be considered a charge upon the local ratepayer who finances the public library. There is also a widespread feeling that students do not buy as many books as they should and that they rely too much on borrowing from libraries. Nevertheless, what is popularly called the education "explosion" could become a damp squib if students are unable to get access to the books which are essential, and London librarians, both public and university, will have to come to grips with this problem.

The other factor associated with the increase in the student population is the overwhelming pressure on accommodation in public reference libraries. Once again, the university libraries are unable to meet the demand for working space for thousands of students, who therefore overflow into the public libraries. Thus it is customary for London's public reference libraries to be filled to capacity all day by students, many of whom are not using the books in the reference library but are merely using the accommodation for studying. Public librarians in London are concerned that the ordinary users of the reference library, those who wish to consult yearbooks, directories, encyclopedias, etc., are unable to find seats, and that the reference library is thereby unable to fulfil its primary function. Here again, it is felt by many librarians that the problem of working space for students is principally one for the universities, and that the difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that many academic libraries are closed in the evening and for long vacation periods. It is a problem which is growing larger and one which can only be solved by joint action.

Lower in the educational scale similar improvements are being made in the realms of secondary education. London is developing a new type of "comprehensive" school, in which the three distinct types of secondary education—grammar, technical, and general—are grouped under one roof instead of being in separate schools as formerly. These trends in secondary education result in more young people remaining

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in school beyond the minimum school leaving age of fifteen years and taking the General Certificate of Education. Librarians, of course, welcome this trend which brings about an increase in purposive reading. These new schools, and some of the older ones, are expanding and improving their school libraries and employing qualified librarians, on a full or part-time basis. Public librarians do not regard this development as a form of competition, since they believe that children in their formative years cannot have too many books around them. But librarians in London, where at the moment the boroughs are not responsible for schools, also realize that much closer cooperation between school libraries and public libraries will be essential if duplication of effort is to be avoided.

At this level of education, also, there is a growing demand for accommodation in the public libraries for study purposes. Modern houses and flats usually have but one general living room; and if this is dominated, as is often the case, by television, then a child who has studying to do is forced to look outside the home for the necessary peace and quiet. Perceptive librarians are encouraging these students to turn to the public library for the solution to their difficulty, and newly built children's libraries are being equipped with reference rooms where children can do their homework, with immediate access to a good collection of reference books. This may appear to be inconsistent with the attitude adopted towards university students, but in the case of the younger children the numbers are of manageable proportions and the time they spend in the library is usually very much less. Furthermore, this is all part of the fundamental process of fostering in children the habit of using books, and an awareness of their value.

Closely allied to the question of education is the problem of the increasing leisure which derives from the development of automation and the consequent reduction of the working week. Librarians will have to give a great deal of thought in the near future to the ways in which public libraries can encourage people to make intelligent use of their leisure hours. There is talk of using television to create a "university of the air," and although very few libraries at present make any use of television programs they will obviously need to cooperate with any development of this kind.

It is, of course, generally true that it is educated people who tend to make heavy use of public libraries, and this was underlined in a recent survey of seven typical London libraries.⁹ The survey showed, by sampling methods, that 54 per cent of the people were or had been

public library members (i.e., registered borrowers), and 30 per cent were still members. These figures agree very closely with those of other surveys. The figure of 30 per cent membership is further increased by an estimate arrived at in the course of the survey, that some 15 per cent of the public are reading library books borrowed by other members of the family or by friends. This total figure of about 45 per cent of the population of central London using public libraries, without all of them appearing in registration figures, is much higher than the usual estimates of public library usage for Great Britain. As is shown in the details of the survey, library membership can be correlated strikingly with length of education. For instance, 35 per cent of members had formal education up to age 17 or over, as against only 14 per cent of the non-members. It is, of course, as the report observes, "the minorities, the exceptional people, who are challenging, the well-educated person who never sets foot in a library, the poorly educated one who is a regular reader."⁹ But generally, one may expect that as educational facilities improve, so will use of public libraries increase.

Creation of Greater London

Will the public libraries of one of the world's largest conurbations be equipped in the future to meet these demands likely to be made on them? The signs are that they will, that the radical reforms needed are on the way. In 1960, the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London reported, after collecting evidence from many organizations, among them the Library Association.¹⁰ The memorandum submitted by the Association bears some evidence of divided opinions, but its most important recommendations were that Library Authorities should be encouraged to develop collectively the system of special collections and extended reference services, and that if amalgamation of authorities was decided on, a convenient size for such amalgamations from a library point of view would be areas containing a population of around 250,000.

It is interesting to note that under the resulting London Government Act, which came into force in April 1965, the new Greater London area consists of thirty-two "all purpose" authorities, with populations from 200,000 to over 350,000. The changes were indeed radical. The difference between Inner and Outer London was eliminated. The London County Council disappeared, to be replaced by a Greater London Council for the whole area. The county of Middlesex also disappeared, and such ancient boroughs as Chelsea, St. Marylebone, and

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Hampstead lost their identity. As must happen in any radical reform, there has been some bitterness and not a little confusion, as senior officials have been demoted, and long cherished plans have been scrapped. But it cannot be denied that this is a sensible and reasonable plan for local government. It may have been long overdue, but nevertheless it took courage for the Government of the day to push it through in the face of outraged local pride.

From a library point of view, not only is it a matter of some gratification that the proposal of the Library Association should have come to pass, but there are other advantages apart from the new cohesion of Greater London. The new authorities are all-purpose authorities, which will make cooperation with education easier, and it is expected that will continue the Advisory Body of Librarians for the much larger area.

The implementation of the new Public Libraries Act will also have effects apart from improving the general standards of service. It has been indicated that the London Union Catalogue and the South-Eastern Regional Bureau should amalgamate, and discussions have already started between the two organizations with this end in view. Under the Act, there is provision also for the inclusion of non-public libraries.

For the London public libraries, then, a new era is about to begin. They have been reorganized into financially viable, large population, all-purpose authority groups; there will be a single cooperative Bureau for the whole of the South-East England, and there will be a new co-ordinating authority for London in the Greater London Council. By their own efforts, the London boroughs have already overcome many of their difficulties, and the administrative foundations which have been laid down can now be built on.

The library requirements of the future which are already apparent should not be too difficult to solve. Central London is already self-supporting in British books, and the twenty-eight special collections are a major contribution to London's bibliographical resources. A start has been made on increasing the representation of foreign books, and an extension of cooperative acquisition here should not be too difficult. With the very much larger area in one cooperative scheme, there will be increased anxiety about the speed of obtaining a book through the use of the union catalog. Experiments have been made in the use of Teletype, and it will also be necessary to examine possible mechanical alternatives to enlarge the union catalog. A preliminary study on computerization has already been made.

There are also obvious possibilities of an early solution of the major deficiency of the London public library system—the need for three or four major public reference libraries, open six or seven days a week for twelve hours a day. The new borough of Camden, for example, comprising St. Pancras, Holborn, and Hampstead, has two new central libraries in existence and one in the planning stage. One of these could will become the major reference library for north London. The new city of Westminster, including Westminster, Paddington, and St. Marylebone, has the potential for developing another major reference library.

The general reader in London is already well-served; he will have better service in the future. Bookstocks can be expected to improve and service points to increase in number and convenience. The specialist user may have to travel a little further than his nearest service point, but there is no reason why, in the near future, he should not be able to get a service as good as that provided in the great central libraries of the provincial cities. It is particularly fortunate that the vital legislation has come about at one time. If either the Public Libraries Act or the London Government Act had been deferred or dropped, the result would have been confusion. As it is the two pieces of legislation neatly dovetail together, and forward planning can be undertaken with confidence.

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Appendix I

The London Boroughs

Established by the London Government Act 1963

On April 1, 1965, the local authorities which governed the area known as Greater London disappeared under the London Government Act of 1963, and were replaced by thirty-two London Boroughs, which have populations varying between about 200,000 to over 300,000. Chief Librarians for the new authorities have now been appointed as follows:

<i>Name of new authority</i>	<i>Former administrative areas</i>	<i>Chief librarian</i>
Barking	Parts of Barking and Dagenham	W. G. Fairchild
Barnet	Hendon, Finchley, Barnet, East Barnet and Friern Barnet	S. J. Butcher
Bexley	Bexley, Erith, Crayford, and parts of Chislehurst and Sidcup	P. E. Morris
Brent	Willesden and Wembley	J. T. Gillett
Bromley	Beckenham, Bromley, Orpington, Penge and parts of Chislehurst and Sidcup	A. H. Watkins
Camden	Hampstead, Holborn and St. Pancras	W. R. Maidment
Croydon	Croydon, Coulsdon and Purley	T. E. Callander
Ealing	Acton, Ealing and Southall	N. E. Binns
Enfield	Edmonton, Enfield and Southgate	A. E. Brown
Greenwich	Greenwich and Woolwich	D. R. Leggatt
Hackney	Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington	R. P. Bateman
Hammersmith	Fulham and Hammersmith	L. F. Hasker
Haringey	Hornsey, Tottenham and Wood Green	W. B. Stevenson
Harrow	Harrow	S. G. Berriman
Havering	Romford and Hornchurch	G. H. Humby
Hillingdon	Uxbridge, Hayes and Harlington, Ruislip-Northwood, Yiewsley and West Drayton	P. Colehan
Hounslow	Brentford and Chiswick, Heston and Isleworth, Feltham	S. M. Green
Islington	Finsbury and Islington	C. A. Elliott
Kensington	Chelsea and Kensington	S. C. Holliday
Kingston	Kingston-upon-Thames, Malden and Coombe, Surbiton	F. J. Owen
Lambeth	Lambeth and part of Wandsworth	S. W. Martin
Lewisham	Lewisham and Deptford	R. D. Rates
Merton	Mitcham, Wimbledon, Merton and Morden	E. J. Adsett

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Newham	East Ham, West Ham, parts of Barking and Woolwich	J. Green
Redbridge	Ilford, Wanstead and Woodford, parts of Dagenham and Chigwell	F. C. Kennerley
Richmond	Barnes, Richmond and Twick- enham	G. Turner
Southwark	Bermondsey, Camberwell and Southwark	G. Johnson
Sutton	Beddington and Wallington, Sutton and Cheam, Carshalton	Stanley Dean
Tower Hamlets	Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney	Herbert Ward
Waltham Forest	Chingford, Leyton and Walthamstow	S. E. Overall
Wandsworth	Battersea and part of Wandsworth	E. V. Corbett
City of Westminster	Westminster, St. Marylebone and Paddington	K. C. Harrison