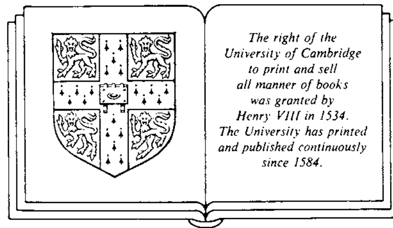
Neighbourhood and community in Paris, 1740–1790

DAVID GARRIOCH



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Introduction

The existence of local communities in eighteenth-century Paris has been both assumed and largely ignored by historians. P. Ariès, writing about 'the family and the city', speaks of large seventeenth-century cities as composed of separate neighbourhoods, each with its own community and its own character, and claims that in eighteenth-century Paris this pattern was upset by the arrival of a more transient population.[1] There is nevertheless plenty of evidence to suggest that, however reduced, local loyalties remained strong. G. Rudé has shown the extent of local participation in many of the revolutionary riots. Many writers, following Mercier, have stressed the social particularities of individual quarters: the inhabitant of the Faubourg St Marcel is 'more turbulent, more quarrelsome, more disposed to rebellion than that in the other quarters': the Marais is a hundred years behind, old-worldly, *triste*. A study by A. Farge has shown how the neighbourhood would often unite to protect beggars from arrest.[2]

Yet only a few studies have taken local ties into account when discussing events in Paris or looking at Parisian society. R. Andrews' unpublished thesis on the revolutionary sections stresses the particular character of the quarters and the pre-revolutionary career of the political leaders within them. R. Cobb has constantly emphasized the idea of the urban village and pointed to its importance in sectional politics: the prominent terrorists of the Year II were all well known in their own quarter and for this reason were as much pushed into politics as deliberately choosing the role. The failure of the *sans-culotte* 'movement' was largely due to its being composed of people whose angle of vision and whose loyalties were local rather than city-wide, much less national.[3]

These, however, are exceptions. Most works on eighteenth-century Paris

[1] P. Ariès, 'The Family and the City', *Daedalus*, 106 (1977), 227–35 (p. 231).

[2] G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1959). L. S. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, new edition, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1782–8), vol. 1, p. 272; vol. 2, pp. 277–8. J. Godechot, *La Prise de la Bastille, 14 juillet 1789* (Paris, Gallimard, 1965), pp. 75–8. J. Kaplow, *The Names of Kings* (New York, Basic Books, 1972), ch. 1. A. Farge, 'Le Mendiant, un marginal? Les résistances aux archers de l'hôpital dans le Paris du XVIIIe siècle', in *Les Marginaux et les exclus dans l'histoire* (Paris, Union Générale d'Editions, 1979), pp. 312–29.

[3] R. Andrews, 'Political Elites and Social Conflicts in the Sections of Revolutionary Paris: 1792 – Year III', unpub. D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1970. R. Cobb, *The Police and the People* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1970), pp. 122, 198–200, and *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1972), pp. 116–21.

ignore geographical differences and take no account of local ties in their assessment of events. Recent studies of the city, concentrating on its social composition, have uncritically used the socio-professional categories elaborated by A. Daumard and F. Furet, classifying Parisians according to the place they are assumed to have occupied in the economic life of the capital.[4] Yet emphasizing economic function and occupational status to the exclusion of family, friendship, and neighbourhood is to ignore the reality of everyday life in the city. Most people felt themselves to belong to a particular area, and even a master artisan might well identify more closely with his next-door neighbour, of a quite different occupation, than with another master of the same trade elsewhere in the city. His wife was even more likely to belong to the local community: men and women had different social networks and could have different allegiances. It is therefore vital to take account of gender divisions when discussing social organization. Other factors could also play a role, of course: for example family ties, age and marital status. Social divisions cannot be traced simply by measuring wealth, professional status, or area of economic activity. This study, in exploring the role of various social bonds within the local community, attempts to show how different combinations of these factors affected social organization in the city.

Studying 'communities' in a city the size of eighteenth-century Paris, however, is hardly the same as in a rural village or even a small town. Where the society under discussion is relatively isolated, geographically and socially, where it falls within a single parish and administrative area, and where the economic and social interdependence of its members is obvious, as in most rural villages, the use of 'community' can lead to no confusion. Works as important as M. Spufford's *Contrasting Communities* or Y. Castan's *Honnêteté et relations sociales en Languedoc* rely heavily on the concept, yet make no attempt to define it and indeed have little need to do so.[5] In a city, however, the meaning of 'community' is much less clear. It is extremely difficult to define its limits, either topographically or socially. Geographic mobility tends to be higher than in rural areas; there is greater contact with outsiders and with strangers; and the different quarters are heavily interdependent. No part of eighteenth-century Paris formed a single economic unit, and few areas were in any sense physically distinct. The various administrative divisions used by different authorities rarely coincided. It was impossible, given the density and the mobility of much of the population, for anyone to know everyone else even in the same street. The city's population was mixed and mobile, the range of occupations, wealth and life-styles in any one area enormous, the web of daily contacts across the whole

[4] A. Daumard and F. Furet, *Structures et relations sociales à Paris au milieu du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1961).

[5] M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1974). Y. Castan, *Honnêteté et relations sociales en Languedoc, 1715–1780* (Paris, Plon, 1974).

city infinitely intricate. In this context the term 'community' requires careful definition.

Community studies have proliferated in recent years and there have been many attempts to find a definition which is applicable in different places and cultures, as well as at different periods.[6] There have however been few studies of 'communities' in early modern cities, although the idea of the quarter as an 'urban village' enjoys some acceptance.[7] On the other hand there has been considerable work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century cities, nearly all of which uses 'community', implicitly or explicitly, to refer to a group of people in a given area who are strongly linked by one or more social bonds such as kinship, work, race or origin, religion, culture, socio-economic status.[8] The obvious difficulty of defining the exact geographic limits of urban communities has led to attempts at 'social area' analysis and to the idea of 'factorial ecology', which tries to use a combination of socio-economic indices in order to map the implantation of particular groups in the urban environment.[9]

This approach is unsatisfactory in a number of ways. The extent and the nature of the 'community' thus mapped depend very much on predetermined categories, and will vary according to the specific criteria chosen. In other words, one to some extent finds the sort of community that one is looking for or that the records available dictate. The use of parish registers for family reconstruction, for example, privileges kinship; that of taxation records makes economic and occupational status seem more important.

But there is a weightier objection both to social area analysis, and to the 'area plus social bonds' definition of 'community' on which it is based. Tracing the particular social bonds which have been selected as significant still does not bring us closer to identifying an urban community. In Victorian cities it is often possible to find out where people lived, how often they moved and where, with whom they socialized, where they worked and with whom, to whom they were related. But none of this necessarily provides evidence of community life, and nor

6 C. J. Calhoun, 'Community: Toward a Variable Conceptualization for Comparative Research', *Social History*, 5 (1980), 105–29. G. A. Hillery, Jr, 'Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement', *Rural Sociology*, 20 (June 1955), 111–23. A. Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1977). P. H. Mann, *An Approach to Urban Sociology* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), ch. 7. D. E. Poplin, *Communities. A Survey of Theories and Methods of Research* (New York, Macmillan, 1972).

7 M. Garden, 'La Vie de quartier', *Bulletin du Centre pour l'histoire économique et sociale de la région lyonnaise*, 3 (1977), 17–28.

8 H. Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1962). U. Hannerz, *Soulside. Enquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1969). M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1957).

9 On 'social area' analysis see Poplin, *Communities*, pp. 100–2, and R. Dennis, 'Community and Interaction in a Victorian City: Huddersfield, 1850–1880', Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1975, pp. 10–20. The method has only recently begun to be used in France: M. Demonet and G. Granasztói, 'Une Ville de Hongrie au milieu du XVIe siècle: analyse factorielle et modèle social', *Annales: E.S.C.*, 37 (1982), 523–51.

does it tell us anything about community structure.[10] It does not allow for the way people actually behave. Family ties may or may not be significant. Social homogeneity, while it may be a basis for social interaction, is not necessarily so. Nor does simply tracing different social bonds take into account the subjective element of community: people's sense of belonging and of collective identity. This may be connected with living or working in the same area, with similar socio-economic status, or with family ties, but it is not necessarily concomitant with any or all of these.

A final objection to defining 'community' in terms of area and social bonds is that residence in one particular place is not indispensable. Admittedly a certain degree of proximity is essential, especially in an early modern city without rapid means of transport, but the possibility of a non-territorial community is widely accepted.[11] It may be based, for example, on religion and ethnic origin: the adherents of the French and Dutch churches in London in the sixteenth century did not all live in the same area yet many had a strong sense of collective identity and maintained close ties with each other.[12]

Much recent work has recognized these difficulties and has sought to define 'community' in terms of social interaction, based on social bonds (of which neighbourhood may be one) but not dependent on any specific bond.[13] Communities are seen as networks of individuals, not closed and mutually exclusive, but bound together more closely than they are linked to outsiders. The emphasis is therefore placed not on the type of bonds but on their quality and multiplicity. This is much more satisfactory, for, while recognizing that social ties such as kinship, neighbourhood, religion, or economic interdependence are potentially significant in the formation of a community, it allows that none is necessarily so. It also makes the concept a much more relative one, for it acknowledges that degrees of community are possible, according to the relative strength and quality of the bonds between individual members. If these are weak in relation to the ties that each individual has outside the community, then the community itself is weak. According to the strength and quality of the links between members, too, one community may have less cohesion, resistance to change, or control over its members than another.

This concept of community, however, raises enormous methodological problems. What criteria do we use to discuss the quality of interaction? What observable characteristics indicate the existence of a community, particularly in a

10 R. Dennis and S. Daniels, '"Community" and the Social Geography of Victorian Cities', *Urban History Yearbook 1981*, 7–23 (p. 8).

11 Dennis, 'Community and Interaction', pp. 4, 7, 21. J. Gusfield, *Community. A Critical Response* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1975), p. xvi.

12 A. Pettegree, 'Stranger Communities in London', unpublished paper communicated to Early Modern History seminar, Oxford, 19 Oct. 1981.

13 Macfarlane, pp. 16–19. Dennis, 'Community and Interaction', pp. 21–30.

historical context? I shall suggest a number of such characteristics which are applicable to the study of an early modern urban society.

The first criterion is that there must be social bonds between members of a community, such as kinship, neighbourhood, occupation, although no one of these is indispensable. The more such relationships are shared by the members of a community and the more the links between the same people are multiplied, the stronger the community is likely to be. Of course the bonds between members of a community must be significant ones within that society. In the case of cousins for example, kinship is a significant bond only to the extent that the relationship of cousin is recognized and is important in social organization. It is therefore vital to look at what each social relationship actually meant to people.

Secondly, there must obviously be interaction, based on such social bonds, between the members of the community. Yet clearly the interaction must be of a certain kind, for strangers or mere acquaintances may have things in common and meet, perhaps drink together, yet do not necessarily belong to a single community. It is not the frequency or the regularity of contact that is important, either: neighbours in a block of flats might see each other on the stairs every day, yet scarcely know each other. 'Community' assumes a certain quality of human interaction which is not directly related to frequency of contact. It is not necessarily friendly contact, for although friendship is a bond that can be significant it is not indispensable.

The essential characteristic of community interaction is that it conforms to certain unwritten rules which do not apply to outsiders. Of course all human relationships are to some extent governed by general norms of behaviour and those observed in different communities in the same society, in the same area, or in the same status group, may well be the same. But the behaviour of people towards members of the same community will differ from the way they react to those of another community. Thus, for example, when a husband in eighteenth-century Paris beat his wife other members of the family could and would intervene readily; neighbours and others who knew the couple well would frequently step in, depending on the circumstances. Strangers or casual acquaintances would very rarely do so: two women who had witnessed an assault on a fishwife whom they knew only vaguely later testified that they hadn't gone to her assistance because they thought the man beating her was her husband. Those who did intervene in this case were the others in the market who knew the woman well. Membership of a community involves both familiarity with the others who belong and acceptance of certain norms and behavioural expectations to which all the members generally conform.[14] This of course is the essential element of collective identity. The necessity for a degree of familiarity further implies that a community must be limited in size, although without

[14] Archives Nationales, Paris, Y11239, 18 September, wit. 5 and 6. All MS references are to Archives Nationales unless otherwise stated. Calhoun, p. 117. Poplin, p. 22.

requiring it to be of any particular size: the larger it is the more difficult it will be for all the members to recognize each other and to fulfil their mutual obligations, and the weaker the community is likely to be.

The existence of behavioural norms also requires a degree of self-regulation, for the community's survival depends on continued observance of its internal rules. There must be some incentive to conform to them, either through the benefits gained or because of the penalty incurred if they are breached or ignored. Degrees of community are therefore possible: communities may be able to enforce their rules with differing degrees of success.[15] Some members may be able to appeal to an outside authority – the police for example – to override community sanctions. In other contexts, particularly in the urban environment where for some people it is relatively easy to move, the social cost of non-conformity may not be as great as in a rural village where there is no escape from community disapproval. Escape may also be possible through social as well as geographic mobility. It is this possibility which accounts for the inability of local communities during the Industrial Revolution to enforce traditional moral obligations on many manufacturers.[16] This too is more likely to occur in a city, where people whose ties to a particular community are relatively weak have the possibility of joining an alternative community, perhaps with different behavioural expectations (for example in another status group). Indeed it is quite conceivable that an individual could belong to more than one community at a time: if we are talking about local communities, for example, a person may live in one area but work and spend leisure time in another.

In order to identify a community, then, we need to pick out the behavioural conventions which influence the interaction of individuals in different ways according to whether they belong to the community or not. We can look for evidence of self-regulation and of community sanctions against those who do not conform to the norms. Such a definition is admittedly very fluid and very relative, but community is a very fluid and relative thing. It is only in studying the way people behaved in a particular historical, social, and geographic context that we can attempt to define it more precisely, to distinguish the extent and the structures of a community in action.

It is with the extent and structures of a particular sort of community – local communities in eighteenth-century Paris – that this book is primarily concerned. It looks first at the bond of neighbourhood and at the day-to-day functions of the local community, then seeks to define the social limits of the community, to evaluate its wider role in social organization, and to examine the interaction of neighbourhood with the bonds created by kinship and gender, work, religion, and recreations. The final section considers the eighteenth-century Parisian local community in a wider historical context, in relation to long-term changes in social organization.

[15] Calhoun, p. 111. [16] Calhoun, pp. 112–13.

Some aspects of community life have had to be neglected for lack of space, notably the important relationship of *pays*: common geographic origin. Few people lost touch either with their birth-place or with fellow countrymen and women in the capital, and the bond of *pays* is evoked time and again in the documents. It is nevertheless clear that people's place of origin never excluded them from the local community in the way that their work or family background might. Membership of the community depended primarily on adopting certain forms of behaviour and of sociability, and wherever in France a newcomer arrived from he or she seems to have been sensitive to these forms. Acceptance was not dependent on origin.

The principal source used is the papers of the *commissaires au Châtelet*, preserved in the Y series at the Archives Nationales in Paris. There were forty-eight *commissaires*, two or three in each of the twenty quarters into which the Châtelet divided the city. Their functions have been described elsewhere, and I will therefore discuss them only briefly.[17] As the local police officials of Paris, the *commissaires* had a wide range of functions: civil, criminal, and administrative. Of these civil matters were the most remunerative, and foremost among them the apposition of *scellés après décès*: wax seals placed on the effects of a deceased person in order to ensure that nothing was removed before a full inventory could be drafted by a *notaire*. As an added safeguard the *commissaire* drew up a summary description of the premises and its contents, often a valuable indication of the way of life, if not the wealth, of the individual concerned. The *scellés* could only be removed by the *commissaire* himself, and a list of those present – the heirs and any creditors or their representatives – is always included.

Also profitable were *comptes*, the checking of the account rendered by an executor or by a child's guardian of his handling of the affairs with which he was charged; and *partages*, the division of property or money, normally after the sale of an estate or of a debtor's property ordered by a court. All of these documents cost a great deal and concern only the more affluent sections of the population: D. Roche estimates that *inventaires après décès*, which normally followed the removal of the *scellés*, were drawn up for ten to fifteen per cent of those who died in the capital.[18]

The civil functions of the *commissaires* also included statutory declarations, among them the *déclarations de grossesse* (declarations of pregnancy) which all single women who became pregnant were supposed to make. There were in

[17] M. Chassaigne, *La Lieutenance générale de police de Paris* (Paris, A. Rousseau, 1906), ch. 3. S. Kaplan, 'Note sur les commissaires de police de Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 28 (1981), 669–86. A. Williams, *The Police of Paris* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1979). A. Gazier (ed.), 'La Police de Paris en 1770', *Mémoires de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile de France*, 5 (1879), 1–131 (pp. 42–61).

[18] D. Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris* (Paris, Aubier, 1981), p. 60.

addition formal complaints, in theory the first step in a civil proceeding. They were undertaken entirely voluntarily; and whereas after about 1750 declarations cost nothing, complaints were quite expensive: three *livres* for the *commissaire* and fifteen *sols* for his clerk, which represented two or three days' income for a labourer.[19] Despite this the plaintiffs come from a very wide range of socio-economic groups, even including unskilled workers. Few complaints were taken further, however, for civil enquiries, the next step, could be very expensive.[20] They were usually restricted to well-off people but concern a wide range of matters and include *enquêtes en séparation*: proceedings brought by a woman against her husband.

The only other civil matters to produce many documents were those in which the presence of the *commissaire* was required to authorize entry into private property: to inspect and describe the state of repair of a building; in order to seize the possessions of a debtor; or when the different trades corporations wanted to search for illegally made goods.

Criminal functions were more straightforward: receiving declarations of theft; interrogating suspects brought in by the *garde* (the city militia) or by the *inspecteurs* (subordinate police officers); hearing witnesses in the criminal enquiries which were undertaken before a case came into the courts of the Châtelet. The witnesses were named by the victim or by the *procureur du roi au Châtelet* (police prosecutor) and were obliged to attend, but their testimony was supposed to be given in private.[21]

Finally, as the local representatives of the *lieutenant général de police*, the *commissaires* were supposed to enforce all the police regulations of the Châtelet.[22] This they did with varying degrees of enthusiasm but with increasing efficiency towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was a side of their work which left few documents except the reports of the *garde* which, twenty-four hours a day, brought in people arrested for disorderly behaviour or because they looked in some way suspect. The special jobs for which certain *commissaires* were responsible, such as arresting beggars, inspecting carriages, supervising the book trade, the prisons, the gaming-houses or the markets, keeping watch on Jews or Protestants – the list goes on and on – generally leave some trace, although the reports made to the *lieutenant général* have rarely survived. A few may be found among the Bastille papers in the Arsenal library.

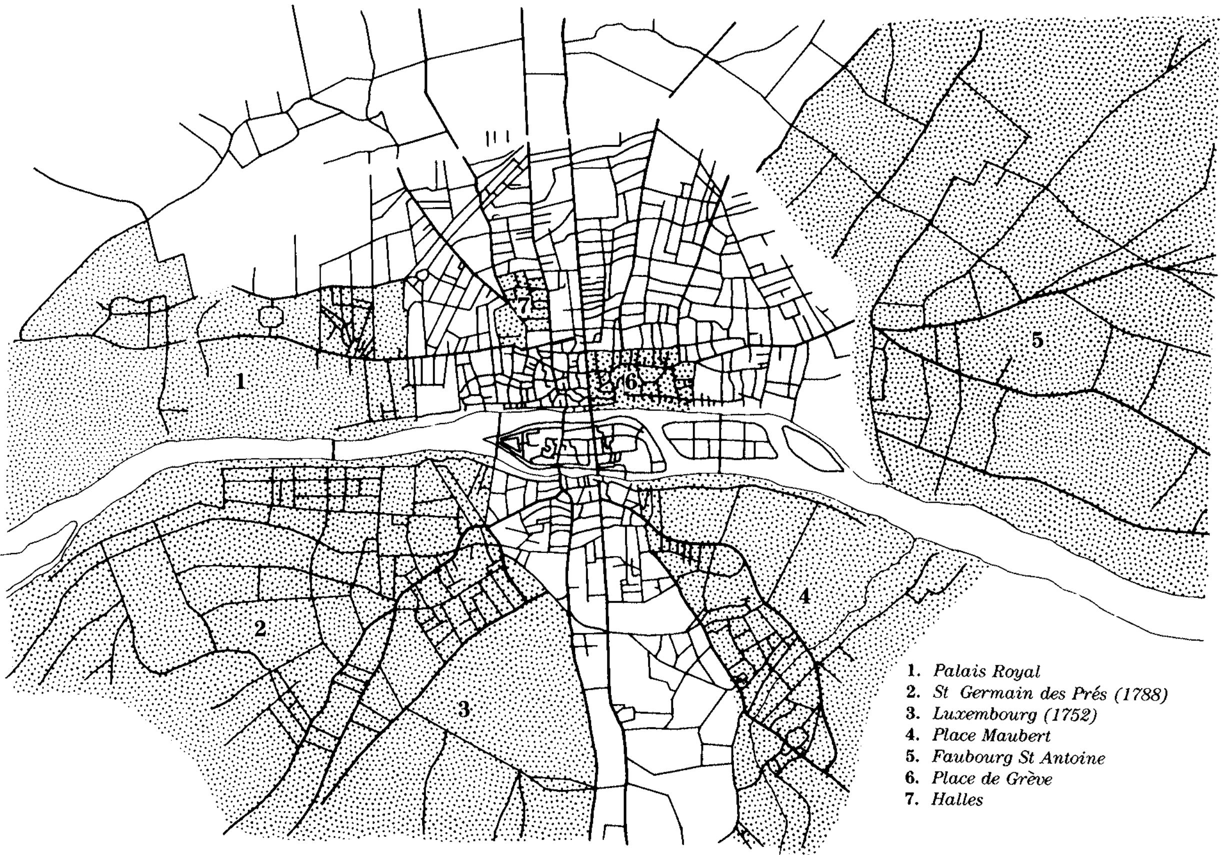
The bulk of the archives are in more or less the condition in which they were handed over in 1791 by the last incumbent of each office, only one of the forty-eight failing to surrender them. The system of classification is therefore

[19] Chassaigne, p. 165. The figure of about 30 *sols* a day is used by Rudé, *Crowd*, p. 21, and by Roche, *Peuple*, p. 60.

[20] Y10944, account book of *commissaire* Thiérion. See table 1, p. 14.

[21] Jousse, *Traité des fonctions, droits et privilèges des commissaires-enquêteurs-examinateurs* ... (Paris, 1759), pp. 14–15, 101.

[22] N. de Lamare, *Traité de la police*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1705–38), vol. 4 by Le Cler du Brillet.



1. Eighteenth-century Paris, quarters selected for close study

that used by the *commissaires* themselves, usually chronological. The documents are not individually numbered and can therefore be cited only by box number and date. Each *commissaire* inherited his predecessor's papers and clearly weeded them out, for, although some of the offices went back to the sixteenth century, documents earlier than the end of the seventeenth century are rare. The later years are consistently better documented, with the records for the second half of the eighteenth century almost complete, to judge from the surviving inventories drawn up by the *commissaires* from year to year. Occasionally there are references in complaints or enquiries, or in outside sources, to documents which are no longer there and it is usually the less remunerative matters which have disappeared: there are a few boxes which contain only *scellés*.

The bulk of the series – some 6,000 boxes, each containing on average two to three hundred documents – made careful selection necessary. As the documents reflect the character and social composition of the area in which each *commissaire* was stationed, six quarters were chosen for close study: firstly the central market area because of its economic importance, its central position, and its place in events in the city; the quarter of the Place de Grève, at the crossroads of Paris; and the Faubourg St Antoine, also important during the Revolution, semi-rural yet home to a very large number of artisans, a useful contrast to the inner-city area. There is the Place Maubert quarter, containing the second-largest market in the city and harbouring a large seasonal and immigrant population, but also including the Faubourg St Marcel with its tanning and brewing trades, its horse-market, and its ancient village centre. The Luxembourg–St Germain des Prés area was included because of its relatively recent development, its large population of domestic servants, and its great extremes of rich and poor. Finally the Palais Royal quarter, prominent in the early years of the Revolution, offered a very mixed collection of people: foreigners, for there were many hotels; bankers and wealthy merchants; the rich noble families of the St Roch parish; shopkeepers along the busy rue St Honoré; and pockets of a humbler character, particularly in the back-streets behind St Roch. Choosing areas at both ends of the city and on both banks of the river was important in order to get an idea of movement around the city and of the personal ties which stretched across it.

It was necessary, since the papers are chronological, to decide which years to look at. Because each sort of document contains different information, it was preferable to read every one in each box rather than to select any particular type. Similarly, in order to gauge the effect of the seasons on the type of documents and the life of the city it was necessary to follow each *commissaire* throughout the year. After a preliminary survey one year at each end of the period was picked out for close study. 1752 was a year of peace when, if prices rose fairly high, they by no means reached crisis point. 1788, at the end of the regime yet before the Revolution dramatically changed the role of the *commissaires* and the quality of their papers, began as a relatively normal year but ended with a particularly