

# ELECTORAL REGISTERS

Electoral registration was introduced in 1832 and registers have been issued for each parliamentary constituency every year since then, with certain exceptions. Registration was suspended in both World Wars and there are no registers for 1916 and 1917 (1915-17 in Scotland) and from 1940 to 1944 inclusive. There were two registers in 1868 and 1885 and also between 1919 to 1926 inclusive and in 1945 and 1946

The British Library has a complete set of electoral registers for the whole of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) from and including 1947. It also has 20,000 volumes pre 1947.

Copies of electoral registers can also usually be found in local studies libraries. A full listing of what is available is given in Jeremy Gibson's [Electoral Registers 1832-1948](#) (3rd edition. Family History Partnership, 2008).

Electoral registers list everyone who was eligible to vote in parliamentary and local elections. They were introduced by the Representation of the People Act 1832; henceforth, the right to vote could only be exercised by those on the register. They did not entirely replace pollbooks (see below) until 1872, when the ballot became secret. As the franchise became wider, so electoral registers became fuller.

The 1832 Act probably doubled the number of those eligible to vote. Further acts passed in 1867, 1884, 1918 and 1928. Each substantially increased the size of the electorate, and hence the number of names recorded in electoral registers. Electoral registers give the name and 'place of abode' of the voter, and (until 1948) the nature of his/her qualification to vote, together with the names of any tenants. For a few years after 1918, the names of 'absent voters' in the services were noted, with their service details. Between 1885 and 1915 the names of the landlords of those who qualified on the lodger's franchise were noted.

Successive changes to voting qualifications have progressively increased the voting franchise as follows:

- 1 in 7 men by 1832
- 1 in 3 men by 1867
- 2 in 3 men by 1884
- All men over 21 and all women over 30 by 1918
- All adults over 21 by 1928
- All adults over 18 by 1969

Until 1918 electoral registers were compiled, at first, in alphabetical order of voters, parish by parish. This began to change in 1878 when it was permitted (later required) to merge parliamentary registers with burgh rolls (the registers for municipal elections). The latter were effectively lists of ratepayers and, as rates were then collected door-to-door, their arrangement was in street order and gradually parliamentary registers followed this pattern.

Since 1918 the principal division of parliamentary registers has been the Polling District. The arrangement within polling districts is normally by street in alphabetical order within which properties are in street order. Some registers have alphabetical indexes to street names.

Before anyone can discover whether the British Library has the register required, it is necessary to identify the constituency concerned. To do this, one must first establish the period for which registers are needed. Since 1832 boundary revisions have taken place in 1867 (1868 in Scotland), 1885, 1918, 1948, 1955, 1970, 1983, 1995, and 2010 (implemented in 2005 in Scotland and 2007 in Wales). There was a partial revision in 1944 when seats with electorates of over 100,000 were split in two or more.

Once the constituency or constituencies that are wanted have been established by whatever means, then Parliamentary constituencies and their registers since 1832

[[www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/offpubs/electreg/parliamentary/constituencies.html](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/offpubs/electreg/parliamentary/constituencies.html)] should be consulted to find out if the British Library has the registers

The British Library has teamed up with the website [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) to digitise family history resources from the British Library's Social Sciences collections. Starting in June 2011 and for the next 9 months the project will see the scanning of UK electoral registers covering the century that followed the Reform Act of 1832.

This will make a vast range of names, addresses and other genealogical information contained in the Library's registers available, accessible and searchable remotely for the first time. The resources will become available via [findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk) and in the Library's Reading Rooms from 2012.

- Several websites offer pay for view access to electoral records between 2002 and 2012.  
<http://www.192.com/people/electoral-roll/> £12 for 6 credits. Can be searched by name or address.
- <http://www.peopletraceonline.co.uk/>

Electoral registers are more useful to family and local historians than are pollbooks (below). They are annual, so will show when particular individuals became eligible to vote in a particular place, and when they left that place. Some of the information they provide may lead to other even more valuable sources of information, e.g. the details provided for absent voters may enable you to trace the latter's service records. Using them may be tedious, due to the lack of indexes, but the rewards for both family and local historians may be considerable.

#### Before 1832 - Poll Books

- Only male owners of freehold property were entitled to vote (under 1 in 10 of the adult male population)
- Records were kept in county *Poll Books* of everybody who voted in a contested election
- Voters are listed in surname/forename order together with their occupation and the township in which their qualifying freehold property lay
- Most poll books are post 1711

Before 1832 the basic qualification for the vote in *county elections* was ownership of freehold land worth 40 shillings (£2) a year by men aged 21 and over. Until 1774 the man had to reside in the county in which he voted; no woman was eligible. It was said that an income of forty shillings a year made a man independent, being sufficient to furnish him with all the necessaries of life. By 1832 forty shillings would just about support a labouring man for a month, but the number of people who had such an estate in England and Wales was then only about 247,000. From 1763 the holders of annuities or rent charges on freehold land were also entitled to vote.

Before 1832 the qualification for the vote in *borough elections* varied greatly from place to place, much depending on local custom. In Aylesbury, Cricklade, East Retford and Shoreham, for example, voting was restricted to those with a forty-shilling freehold, and this was the normal qualification in the large county boroughs. In Bristol freemen as well as freeholders could vote.

In some boroughs the payment of "scot and lot" (effectively the poor rate) was sufficient qualification, in others (called potwalloper or potwaller boroughs) anyone who occupied a separate tenement in which to boil his own pot could vote. In many boroughs the right to vote was restricted to freemen, but in some the freemen had to be resident in the borough and in others they had to pay scot and lot. In some boroughs only those freemen who were free by birth or apprenticeship could vote.

Before 1832 some 188,391 men had the right to vote in the boroughs in England and Wales, a figure which went up to 285,958 after the 1832 reforms and to 1,195,360 after those in 1867 which extended voting rights to lodgers paying at least £10 a year

**Parliamentary Constituencies including Ossett - record location.**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Ossett Poll District</b>	<b>Record location</b>
Bef 1832	Yorkshire		(1741/2:1807;1835;1837available at WYAS series C701)
1832-1867	West Riding	1840/55Wakefield 1856/69Dewsbury	(1840-1867 available at WYAS)
1867-1884/85	West Riding [East]	1870-1885 Ossett	(1868-1885 available at WYAS and British Lib BL Y 39/3)
1885-1918	Morley	Ossett	(1885-1915 available at WYAS)
1918- 1983	Batley & Morley		( 1918-39+1945 Batley Library: 1947-83 British Library)
1983-2009	Normanton		( Local Studies [1974 to date]; British Library; WYAS?)
2010 -date	Wakefield		

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