

Why the Electoral Registers are important to you!

Poll Books listed the men who voted in parliamentary elections and the candidates for whom they voted, the poll books for county and borough seats list the names of electors, their parish of residence and how they voted, and may also state an elector's exact address and (if different) the address of the property that gave him the right to vote. Within a poll book, the list of electors may be arranged by parish, ward, hundred or township. Poll Books are extremely rare for the period prior to 1696, when Parliament made sheriffs responsible for recording the poll in county elections.

An act of 1711 required poll books to be deposited with the Clerk of the Peace and so many poll books survive for elections after this date. In 1872 the secret ballot was introduced so that documents recording how men voted could no longer be prepared. The last general election for which true poll books exist is therefore that of 1868.

Electoral Registers are of prime importance as they list all those entitled to vote, and have been kept annually which can be of great help with your research even between the census years. Electoral Register changes with Parliamentary Elections from;

1832 ***Representation of People Act 1832***

(Otherwise known as The Great Reform Act)

1841 – 1851 – 1861 Census years

1864 Reduced number of Parliamentary Constituencies

1871 – 1881 Census years

1885 Sharp increase on the number of Electoral Registers

1891 – 1901 – 1911 Census years

1915 The compilation of registers was suspended for the remaining duration of WW1

1918 Registers resumed in the autumn of that year with a General Election including **The Absent Voters List 1918** a list that records 73,000 people entitled to vote who were not at home. Also, **The Reform Act 1918** gave women over 30 the vote.

1928 Women over 21 were granted the vote, in line with men.

1939 **Population Register** – on the eve of WW2

1940 No registers were published due to World War 2 but resumed in 1944
(some were published in 1939, 1945 and 1946 but are not available)

1947 Publication of registers resumed.

1984 New Parliamentary Constituencies.

1969 ***Representation of the People Act 1969*** extended the vote to men and women over 18

1995 Again, new constituencies.

2008 **Voting Age (Reduction Bill)** a Private Members' Bill, to reduce the voting age to 16 and over, the Bill did not become law.

2010 Constituency 'Boundary' changes

2018 Possibly, more boundary changes?

Parliamentary Elections

Originally, only men aged over 20 could vote. Those who owned a freehold worth 40 shillings or more could vote, unless they lived in towns and cities, where qualifications varied.

From 1832, all men owning land worth £10 or over, and townsmen leasing land worth £10 or over, could vote.

In 1867 the countryside qualification value was dropped to £5 and the franchise also extended to those paying £50 or more in rent, while in the towns all male householders were allowed to vote.

In 1884 this latter qualification was extended to the countryside. Votes for all men over 20 and female householders over 30 came in 1918, with the vote extended to all women aged over 20 in 1928.

Up to 1970 those over 20 were listed, and in the year someone reached the age of 21 the letter 'Y' may appear.

From 1971, everyone over 17 appears.

The British Library has the national collection of printed electoral registers from when they were first produced under the Representation of the People Act to the present day.

However, before you start your research, we suggest you explore the British Library at www.bl.uk/collection-guides/uk-electoral-registers and scroll down to consult the '**Parliamentary Constituencies and their Registers Since 1832**' (PDF format) to find the right constituency according to the date when you want to start your research.

Findmypast and the British Library have worked together to digitise historic registers for the period 1832 – 1932 and you can log into the website on the above page also, the **Absent Voters List 1918** is also available on **ANCESTRY.com** for your family ancestors.

England & Wales, Electoral Registers 1920 – 1932

Explore more than 53 million indexed electoral rolls to discover where your ancestors lived during the 1920s and early 1930s at **FindmyPast**, improved access to these important documents will enable you to bridge the vital gap left by the destruction of the 1931 Census of England & Wales. These records also include the men and women who first gained the right to vote in 1918 and will reveal your ancestor's name, address and their age or occupation.

Further information on researching the Electoral Registers is available on – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/electoral-registration

Citation:

Herber, Mark. 2005. *Ancestral Trails: The Complete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History*. 2nd ed. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., in association with the Society of Genealogists, London