

6) Electoral registration and the registers before 1918

Until the eighteenth century there was no system of electoral registration. A person's right to vote could be challenged and might be allowed or disallowed by the returning officer, with appeal to the courts, but there was no official list of qualified voters to which reference could be made.

The first documents officially compiled as records of qualifications were the Land Tax Duplicates. An Act of 1780 (20 George III c17) enacted that from 1 January 1781 no person should vote in respect of property who had not been assessed to the Land Tax in respect of his qualifying property for six months prior to the election, unless he became entitled to the property only within the year prior to the election in which case he was entitled to vote if the qualifying property had been assessed to Land Tax in the name of a predecessor in title within the previous two years. The Commissioners of the Land Tax were to deliver to the Local Assessors of the Land Tax a printed Form of Assessment and when the assessors had completed their work they were to make 'three Duplicates of Assessments'. One of these was to be attached to the door of the parish church and, after any appeals to the Commissioners had been heard, the Commissioners were to return one of the Duplicates to the Assessors who were to deliver it to the High Constable of the hundred. The High Constable was to deliver it at Quarter Sessions to the Clerk of the Peace who was to file and keep it among the records of Quarter Sessions. The form was laid down in a schedule to the Act, giving three columns: Names of Proprietors, Names of Occupiers, Sums Assessed.

1832-1843

The 1832 Act established for the first time 'a Register of all Persons entitled to vote'. The county lists were to be prepared and published annually by the Overseers of each parish, forwarded via the High Constables of the Hundreds to the Clerk of the Peace, and revised by revising barristers who considered objections, signed the lists and transmitted the revised lists to the Clerk of the Peace. The Clerk of the Peace was to keep the lists among the records of Quarter Sessions and to copy them into a book to be delivered to the sheriff or under-sheriff of the county (who presided at elections). The registration procedure began with the overseers' notice requiring claims, which was published on 20 June, and concluded with the transfer of the copy register to the sheriff or under-sheriff on or before 31 October. The qualifying date was 31 July. The overseers' lists were to be made out in alphabetical order of persons and to give the person's name 'at full length', 'the Place of his Abode', 'the Nature of his Qualifications', and the 'local or other Description of such lands and Tenements, as the same are respectively set forth in his Claim to vote, and the name of the occupying Tenant if stated in such Claim'.

The county lists were to be made out in alphabetical order of hundred and within the hundred in alphabetical order of parish or township. Each entry in the copy-register was to be numbered sequentially. This procedure continued until the Electoral Registration Act, 1843.

The Surrey electoral registers survive from 1832 onwards with the exception of 1833. They are printed and the entries numbered. For each year there is one volume for the Eastern Division and one for the Western Division and the lists are arranged by hundred and parish. When a parish was partly in one hundred and partly in another each part was entered under its own hundred, usually without indication of the incompleteness. Two Surrey parishes were divided between Eastern and Western Surrey in this way: Thames Ditton being partly in Elmbridge hundred (Western Division of Surrey) and partly in Kingston hundred (Eastern Division) and Newdigate partly in Copthorne hundred (Western Division) and partly in Reigate hundred (Eastern Division).

The amount of detail given varies from place to place. To some extent this reflects the greater amount of detail needed to locate an elector's place of abode or qualifying property in metropolitan as opposed to rural Surrey. Some overseers appear to have interpreted the instructions slightly differently, however, and whereas, for example, the overseer of Albury in 1832 identified the property under 'Nature of Qualification' and used the final column for its location, most overseers gave a formal statement of the nature of the qualification, eg 'Tenant at Will of a Farm above the annual value of £50' and identified the property in the final column. The examples show the nature of the information given in these registers.

It should be remembered that the registers record a person in the place where he is qualified, not necessarily where he lives.

The number of names to be found will vary partly with the size of the parish and partly with the nature of property-holding in it. A small parish largely owned by a non-resident landlord and kept in his own hands or let on short leases might have very few names on the list (four in Gatton, for example, in 1832; the population of Gatton in the 1831 Census was 145). The general run of rural parishes would have upward of twenty names, and parishes with an urban centre 150 or more. Because the 1832 Act removed the right to vote in county elections in respect of property qualifying its owner or occupier to vote in boroughs, the number of electors in the county lists in, say, Southwark, is not as great as would otherwise be expected. In these areas only the non-occupying owner (or long leaseholder, etc.) would be registered in the county electoral registers.

1843-1868

The Parliamentary Voters Registration Act, 1843 (6 and 7 Vict c18) laid down a slightly revised procedure and timetable, the procedure now beginning with a precept from the Clerk of the Peace to the overseers. The hundred ceased to have any relevance to registration, the overseers returning their lists directly to the Clerk of the Peace (not through the High Constables) and the lists being arranged by polling district and not by hundred. The clerk was to copy the lists into a book as before for the sheriff (but by 30 November - he was also to sign the sheriff's copy) and was to keep printed copies of the register and make them available for sale. The forms were similar to those enjoined in 1832, although with differently-worded headings and with a column (left blank in the final lists) for entering overseers' objections.

The one significant alteration is that a voter residing outside the polling district in which the parish of his qualification was situated but within the county could, by claim to the revising barrister, vote at his place of abode and a voter residing outside the county could vote at the polling place of any district within the county. His name remained in alphabetical order in the parish of their qualification, but with an asterisk instead of a sequential number, and it was entered in alphabetical order in a separate list after the last voters' list for the polling district in which he had chosen to vote.

These lists are headed 'A List of Persons whose Names do not appear in any of the lists for the Polling District of, but who have been Registered by the Revising Barrister to Vote at the said Polling District of'. The county lists for each parish were to be printed beginning on a new page, to facilitate sale to the public (previously the overseers had sold parish lists and there was no provision for the sale of county lists).

1869-1885

The Representation of the People Act, 1867, was followed by the Registration Act, 1868 (31 and 32 Vict c58) which directed the precepts, forms and lists to be framed in accordance with the altered franchises, 'which

led to a good deal of confusion and many decisions'. The lists for each parish were in two parts: 'Property and ... Occupations at a Rent of £50 and upwards' and 'occupations of the Rateable Value of £12 and upwards, and under £50 Rental. In the 1870 register, and thereafter, the language used is 'Persons on whom a right to Vote in respect of the occupation of Premises is conferred by the Representation of the People Act, 1867'. Voters in the parliamentary boroughs of the county were excluded from exercising the county franchise in respect of the latter qualification and in those areas, therefore, only the former category are listed, and then only in the case of non-occupiers.

In some parishes, such as Camberwell, part of the parish was within a parliamentary borough and part outside. As a result there is a short list of £12-50 occupiers, all in Dulwich, Sydenham and Gipsy Hill (the southern part of the parish): elsewhere in the parish such occupiers would have formed part of the borough electoral register. The list of holders of the ownership franchise, on the other hand, extends through the whole parish. The same is true of Lambeth although here a clue is given in that the occupiers are listed by ward: Brixton First division, Stockwell, and Norwood.

1886-1918

The Registration Act 1885, established three lists of county electors: ownership voters (who still appear in respect of property owned within the parliamentary boroughs); occupation voters other than lodgers; and lodgers. Where a name appeared more than once, the voter could select which entry was to be retained. If he did not do so, an ownership entry (if there was only one) was to be retained, and, if all or none of the qualifying properties was through ownership the qualification relating to the elector's place of abode was to be retained. In every other case, the first entry revised was to be the one retained. The lists of lodgers include columns for 'Description of rooms occupied and whether furnished or not,' 'amount of rent paid' and 'name and address of landlord'. The rent is not always entered (eg Mitcham, 1887). It may be entered as a weekly or annual rent, and this may need to be inferred; for example, two Beddington lodgers in 1887, each with two rooms, were recorded as paying rents of 4s and £20: presumably the 4s was weekly and the £20 annual.

The 1888 County Electors Act established the joint registration of county and parliamentary electors by the Clerk of the County Council outside boroughs (municipal or parliamentary) and the town clerk inside them. The extension of the occupation franchise to single women involved the creation of a new category of county electors who were not parliamentary electors: these lists predominantly comprise single women but include also peers with seats in the House of Lords. The 'service franchise', however, was a purely parliamentary qualification and those possessing this franchise (servants and employees residing in premises in which their master did not reside) appear in a separate category. Lodgers also were parliamentary voters only. Ownership as such was not a qualification for the county franchise, and an elector who was qualified as an owner for the parliamentary franchise had to appear also in the occupation list as qualified to exercise both the parliamentary and county franchise.

The Local Government Act, 1894, enfranchised for parochial (and district council) elections all those who were on the local or the parliamentary register for the parish. It also provided that for the purposes of the Act a woman should not be disqualified by marriage, although a husband and wife could not be qualified in respect of the same property. A married woman could therefore appear on an electoral register for the first time, although in practice few were in fact qualified. Because the owner of property, being qualified as such for the parliamentary franchise, was ipso facto qualified for the parochial franchise, the list of Ownership electors is now sub-headed 'Parliamentary and Parochial Electors'. Where the owner was also occupier he

will also appear as an Occupation Elector (Division 1) - Parliamentary Electors, County Electors, and Parochial Electors. The difference will normally be that his 'ownership' qualification is given as 'freehold house' etc. whereas his 'occupation' qualification will be given as 'dwelling house' and that his number will be asterisked in the occupation list.

An early twentieth-century county electoral register will include the following classes of voter:

Ownership Electors (Parliamentary and Parochial Electors) - Owners of property of freehold, leasehold or copyhold tenure ie

(i) estate of inheritance of freehold tenure of 40s per annum.

(ii) estate for life or lives of freehold tenure between 40s and £5 per annum who (a) occupy the premises, or (b) were seised of the estate in 1832; or (c) acquired it since 1832 by marriage, marriage settlement, devise or promotion to a benefice or office

(iii) estate for life or lives of whatever tenure over £5 per annum

(iv) sixty year lessees and their assignees of £5 per annum; twenty-year lessees and their assignees of £50 per annum; sub-lessees of these if in actual occupation [NB If the place is in a parliamentary borough, only non-occupying owners will be included]

Separate List of Parochial Electors (Ownership) - (Persons entitled to Vote as Parochial Electors only).

Persons qualified as above but qualified as parliamentary electors in respect of property owned elsewhere in the parliamentary county.

The ownership lists include only men. The nature of qualification will usually be given as 'Freehold house and land', 'freehold house', leasehold house', etc.

Occupation Electors (Other than Lodgers)

Division 1 - Persons entitled to Vote as Parliamentary Electors, County Electors, and Parochial Electors.

Occupiers of lands or tenements of the clear yearly value of £10 per annum. Rating is required but not necessarily residence.

Inhabitant occupiers, as owners or tenants, of dwelling-houses. Rating and residence are required.

This list includes only men. The nature of qualification will usually be 'Dwelling house' but may be 'land'.

Division 2 - Persons entitled to Vote as Parliamentary Electors and Parochial Electors, but not as County Electors.

Men inhabiting by virtue of office, service or employment dwelling-houses in which their masters did not reside.

The nature of the qualification is usually 'Dwelling house', but may be 'Rooms at stables', '[Workhouse] Master's house', 'House at station'. The 'Place of Abode' (to which 'Dwelling house' refers) may be, for example, a mill, lodge, railway station, gasworks, police station, or waterworks.

Division 3 - Persons entitled to Vote as County Electors and Parochial Electors, but not as Parliamentary Electors.

These lists include (asterisked) men who are qualified in the same polling district as owners for the parliamentary and parochial franchise.

They include some men not asterisked, who are presumably qualified as owners elsewhere in the parliamentary county and they include women occupiers.

List of parochial occupation electors. These are few. They could include married women with an occupation qualification and also men, presumably qualified as parliamentary and county electors elsewhere.

Supplemental list of those qualified elsewhere but voting for parliamentary elections in that polling district.