

8) Twentieth century franchise legislation

The Representation of the People Act, 1918, simplified the franchise, establishing as the qualifications for men to vote in parliamentary elections (a) residence in the constituency (b) occupation of business premises worth more than £10 per annum in the constituency.

The qualification for men to vote as local government electors was the occupation, as owner or tenant, of land or premises in the area. These included the 'service' franchise where the master was not dwelling in the same house and lodgers in unfurnished rooms.

A woman possessed the parliamentary franchise if she were thirty years old and entitled to be registered as a local government elector in respect of occupation of land or premises, other than a dwelling-house, worth not less than five pounds per annum, or of a dwelling house, or was the wife of a husband entitled to be so registered. Many women over thirty years old were still excluded from the vote: most unmarried daughters living at home, unmarried women living in furnished rooms, and resident servants.

A woman was entitled to be registered as a local government elector (a) where she would be entitled to be registered if she were a man (b) here she was the wife of a man entitled to be registered in respect of premises in which they both resided and was thirty years old

The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, 1928 (18 and 19 George V c12) gave women the right to vote on the same basis as men: in particular, women over twenty-one years and under thirty obtained the vote whereas before then none had been entitled to vote in parliamentary elections and only relatively few in local government elections.

The Representation of the People Act, 1945, extended the local government franchise to all persons qualified as parliamentary electors in the area. The Representation of the People Act, 1948, abolished the business franchise for parliamentary elections but gave a non-resident qualification for local elections to any person occupying as owner or tenant land or premises worth not less than £10 per annum.

The Representation of the People Act, 1969, extended the franchise to those aged eighteen on the day of the relevant election. Previously electors had needed to be twenty-one years old at the date when the register came into force. It abolished the non-resident qualification for voting at local government elections.