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USER GUIDE 6 : ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTERS

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Introduction

Voting for the election of representatives to authorities was established in England in the late Middle Ages. Whether an election was for parliament or for a borough council or, later on, for the county councils, district councils, parish councils, poor law unions and other bodies that arose, there was a need to keep a list of those eligible to vote. Early registers were kept on handwritten electoral rolls and, from 1697-1872, voting recorded in poll books. From 1832, printed electoral registers were mandatory. During the 19th century a wide range of qualification criteria existed for different types of elections, and more than one register was often kept.

A further guide to registers held at Durham County Record Office is included in the printed index for our electoral register microfilms, and this also includes invaluable lists showing which constituency each town and village fell into at different times, and the whereabouts of borough registers.

Summary of records held [inc. references (and microfilm numbers)]

- 1728-1832 Durham City freemen (borough and parliamentary electors) [**Du 5/1 (Index 706)**].
- 1759-1830 County land tax returns (parliamentary electors) [**Q/D/L 1-162 (M7/20-33)**].
Poll books [**Du 1/55, D/X 86, D/X 212, D/CL 3**, and others].
- 1833-1867 Parliamentary electors in Durham North and Durham South [**Q/D/PV 1-38 (M67/1-14)**];
parliamentary and borough electors in Durham City [**Du 1/56/1-36 (M70/1-2)**];
excludes boroughs of Gateshead, South Shields and Sunderland.
- 1868-1885 Parliamentary electors in Durham North and Durham South [**Q/D/PV 39-81 (M67/14-41)**];
excludes boroughs of Darlington, Durham City, Gateshead, Hartlepool, South Shields,
Stockton and Sunderland.
- 1885-1915 Parliamentary electors in Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland, Chester-le-Street, Houghton-
le-Spring, Jarrow, Mid-Durham, North-West Durham and South-East Durham
[**Q/D/PV 82-137 (1885-1892) and CC/CI 1/1-184 (1893-1915) (M67/42-140)**];
excludes boroughs of Darlington, Durham City, Gateshead, Hartlepool, South Shields,
Stockton and Sunderland.
- 1889-1915 County Council electors including most boroughs [**CC/CI 2/1-191**];
excludes boroughs of Gateshead, South Shields and Sunderland.
- 1918-1974 Electoral registers [**CC/CI 1/185-916 (M67/140-304)**];
excludes boroughs of Blaydon (after 1971), Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, South
Shields, Stockton and Sunderland.
- 1975 to date Electoral registers for constituencies in the Durham County Council area and Darlington
[**DC/CI 1/1-272 (1975-2008) and DCC/Res 3/1 (from 2009) (M67/304-370 (1975-2002))**].

Register dates

There are two principal dates associated with each register: the qualifying date for a voter to establish the right to vote in that constituency; and the operative date when the register comes into force. For many purposes, the qualifying date is the most meaningful, since it should establish ownership, occupation or residence at a particular address on or by that date. In our catalogues, and in this leaflet, we usually

quote the operative date (or year); the information contained will usually relate to the situation a couple of months earlier, often in the autumn of the previous year.

Formats of registers

Until 1918, the register entries include the qualification to vote. Also distinguished (from 1878 in boroughs and from 1885 elsewhere) are those who are entitled to vote in certain classes of election but not in others. Electors are always listed by polling district, each of which covers a parish, township or sub-division thereof. There may be more than one register per polling district. The records for the polling districts are then bound together into a register for the constituency, division or district.

Qualification to vote

Rules governing the right to vote (enfranchisement or suffrage) have changed continually through history.

Type of election

Different criteria were used to decide eligibility to vote in national elections and local elections until 1918.

Age qualification

Normally you had to be 21 to vote. The only exceptions to this were military personnel of 19 and 20 at the end of World War I, and women, for whom the age qualification was 30 from 1918 to 1928.

The age qualification was only reduced to 18 by an act of 1969 (effective in 1971).

Sex qualification

Before 1918, women could only vote in local elections under certain conditions (detailed below) so will not appear on most of the earlier registers.

From 1918 to 1928, women over 30 who were householders or married to householders could vote.

After 1928, men and women are treated equally.

Specific groups disqualified from voting:

Registers will not contain the names of:

- aliens, unless naturalised since 1870
- male peers (female peers were deemed qualified by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, but were then specifically disqualified by the 1963 Peerage Act, which granted them the right to sit in the House of Lords)
- lunatics
- those serving as policemen, and for six months thereafter (until 1887)
- election agents and others paid to help at elections (until 1918)
- those in receipt of public assistance and their spouses and children (until 1918)
- postmasters (until 1918)
- commissioners and most collectors of government revenues (until 1918)
- anyone convicted of bribery at elections (for five years thereafter)
- anyone serving a prison sentence
- World War I conscientious objectors from 1918 to 1923
- any whose names have been omitted from the register, even if they are otherwise qualified to vote

Prior to 1678

In certain towns, where a royal charter gave borough status, electors (burgesses or burgers) could vote for the corporation in borough elections. In 1179 the City of Durham was granted borough status and from at least 1602 there was a mayor and an elected corporation of 12 aldermen plus 24 councilmen appointed by 12 trade guilds.

1678-1758

The general election of members of parliament (MPs) was established in 1429. Voters were enfranchised to elect MPs to parliamentary constituencies based on ownership of land in counties (chiefly agricultural) and boroughs (representing business and industry). It was not until 1678 that County Durham gained

representation, with two MPs for the county and two for the city (as a parliamentary borough). The county MPs were elected by county electors, that is men aged 21 who owned the freehold to land with a value assessed at £2 per year. Election of the city MPs was restricted to borough electors, in this case the freemen of the city; these were usually sons of existing freemen or men having finished apprenticeship in the city, but honorary freemen could also be nominated by the city corporation (which led to some famous abuses). Guild minutes and other documents giving names of those accepted as freemen (qualified to vote in both borough and parliamentary elections) exist from 1728 onward (**Du 5/1**, listed in **Index 706**, see also **Du 1/58**).

1759-1831

Parliamentary Acts of 1745 and 1780 instructed each county to deposit a copy of the annual land tax assessment (established in 1692) with the local justices of the peace, to act as an electoral register. Many of these have survived for County Durham. Those held by the Record Office, covering 1759-1830, (**Q/D/L 1-162**) are available on microfilm (**M7/20-33**). An index of names can also be found in our online catalogue database. Other surviving land tax records are held by Durham University Library. From 1798, it was possible, through land tax redemption, to avoid future liability for this tax by the payment of the equivalent of 15 years' charges, so the land tax records following this date do not include all electors (and some smaller areas appear to disappear completely from the record).

1832-1867

Creation of formal electoral registers for parliamentary elections began under the 1832 Reform Act. They have been compiled annually since then except for 1916-1917 and 1940-1944 (when the most recent register was used) and in 1919-1926 when registers were compiled twice yearly.

The ancient boroughs were either converted into municipal boroughs, with a standardised electoral qualification (as was the case with Durham City), or lost borough status completely (as happened to Bishop Auckland) or temporarily (like Darlington). More municipal boroughs were created through the nineteenth century. Borough status generally lasted until the 1974 re-organisation of local government.

Five further parliamentary seats were created in County Durham in 1832: three were the new boroughs of Gateshead, South Shields and Sunderland, and two more were made by dividing the county into Northern and Southern Divisions with two MPs for each.

In counties, the £2 freeholder was joined by:

- anyone having a life interest in, and occupation of, land worth over £2 and under £5 p.a.
- all other holders of real property worth at least £10 (e.g. copyholders)
- tenants of land paying rent of £50 p.a.
- leaseholders for 20 years of land with £50 clear annual value and for 60 years of land with a clear annual value of £10
- a number of other, relatively unimportant, categories

A new standard franchise for borough elections was based on occupation:

- any owner or tenant of a house or other building worth £10 p.a. resident for twelve months prior to the registration date (15 July) and on which all rates and assessed taxes had been charged
- residence within seven miles of the borough
- joint occupancy of premises would qualify each occupier to vote if the value of the premises divided by the number of occupiers provided each with the necessary qualification

A freehold in the borough with the annual value between £2 and £10 also entitled the owner to vote in the county, as did property valued above £10 if in the occupation of a tenant; one property could give rise to various qualifications for various individuals.

Between 1832 and 1918, individuals could be qualified to vote in several constituencies and be qualified by more than one means to vote in a given constituency. The possessor of several qualifications for the one constituency had to select which one to retain, otherwise a standard formula existed for deleting certain types of qualification in preference to other types.

Most existing voting rights were respected for the lifetime of those enjoying them while the 1832 Act increased the electorate from 450,000 to 650,000; Britain had a population of around 15 million.

The parliamentary electoral registers for the county from 1832 to 1892 were kept by the clerk of the peace (the local representative of government). These records have catalogue reference numbers **Q/D/PV 1-137** and are available on microfilm (**M67/1-57**).

The registers are arranged alphabetically by polling district, and alphabetically by township within each district. Within each township the electors were named in alphabetical order with their place of abode, the nature of their qualification and a description of the qualifying property.

The electors of the borough councils (burgesses) form a greater proportion of the population than parliamentary electors. The 1835 Municipal Corporation Act standardised the borough franchise to those living within seven miles of the borough who had occupied rateable property for two and a half years (reduced to one year in 1870) and paid rates. Where the word "successive" appears in borough registers it indicated that the elector had occupied, during the 12 months' qualifying period, more than one property within the particular constituency, each of which was of a rateable value to qualify its occupier to vote.

Durham City's borough electoral registers for 1832-1869 (**Du 1/56/1-36**) are on microfilm (**M70/1-2**).

From 1837, the election to the board of guardians of poor law unions was made by those landowners eligible to pay the poor rate, essentially the same criteria as for parliamentary elections. Elections were held at a meeting of the parish or township vestry.

1868-1884

Three further constituencies, Darlington, Stockton and Hartlepool, were created as new boroughs.

Civil parishes were formally created in 1866, taking on the collection of rates and the election of poor law guardians. Non-metropolitan areas in 1875 were divided into rural and urban sanitary districts; the sanitary authorities managing these were formed from existing boards of guardians and town councillors.

The county franchise was extended to occupiers (owners or tenants) of lands rated at £12, who paid poor rates. The £10 qualification for holders of various classes of real estate was halved to £5.

In boroughs, the franchise was extended beyond owners and tenants to lodgers occupying lodgings worth £10 p.a. with twelve months' residence. Thus a householder franchise was created in the boroughs and the electorate doubled to one adult male in three.

From 1878, parliamentary and burgess lists were frequently drawn up together, and tended to be in street order. Unmarried women who owned property were included in the burgess rolls from 1869.

Alphabetical tables were added, of electors qualifying under the new £12 occupation franchise and those qualifying under the £50 annual rental value franchise (created in 1832).

By 1866, the electorate had risen to 1 million and the 1867 Act increased it to 2 million.

1885-1888

The Redistribution of Seats Act of 1885 removed one of Durham City's MPs and reorganised the county electors into 8 divisions giving a new total of 15 MPs. (Further changes to constituencies have continued regularly and there are currently 16 MPs covering the historic County Durham area.)

Occupiers and lodgers were enfranchised in the counties, as they had previously been in the boroughs. Freeholders of inherited land (or land acquired by marriage) worth £2, freeholders of any land worth £5 and certain lessees were also enfranchised.

By 1884, the electorate had increased to 2.6 million and following the 1885 Act 60% of adult males became eligible to vote (virtually all male heads of household), giving a total electorate, in 1885, of 4.4 million. The twelve months' residence requirement persisted.

The registers continued to be arranged by polling district. Separate alphabetical tabulations were compiled for each polling district of the two classes of occupation electors (in which the £50 leaseholders were included), ownership electors and lodger electors. A limited number of ownership electors became qualified to vote in the county constituency adjoining the parliamentary borough in which their qualifying property was situated because the occupier of that property was using it as the basis of his qualification to vote in the borough. This obtains from 1832 but becomes more apparent with the change in format of registers in 1885.

1889-1893

County councils, such as Durham County Council, were created in 1889 with county councillors elected every four years. At the same time, some municipal boroughs became county boroughs, independent from the surrounding county.

Separate registers of county council electors run from 1889 to 1915 (**CC/CI 2/1-191**). The county franchise was given to all those who could vote in parliamentary elections as £10 occupiers as well as to existing burgess voters. These registers are arranged by county council electoral district. Each contains two lists: those who could vote in both local and parliamentary elections; and those who qualified only for local elections who are therefore additional to those listed in the parliamentary electoral registers. Borough electors are included in these. This collection has not been microfilmed but can be requested.

Residents of a municipal borough were also represented on the county council and those duly qualified to vote appear in the county's local government electoral registers; residents of county boroughs (created in and after 1889) were not and do not. Separate non-resident lists were compiled for both boroughs and counties for those living between 7 and 15 miles of the borough or county who were qualified to stand for election to those councils.

1894-1915

Married women were enfranchised for local government elections in 1894, although the property which qualified the husband could not be used to provide the qualification of the wife.

The county council took over responsibility for keeping electoral registers. Those for 1893-1974 (excluding county borough records) have catalogue numbers **CC/CI 1/1-916** (on microfilms **M67/58-304**).

In 1894, civil parish councils were rationalised and became elected. Sanitary authorities became rural district councils and urban district councils; the elected district councillors also served as poor law guardians until 1930. The electorate for these bodies, known as "parochial electors", was the combined parliamentary and county council electorate for the particular area concerned.

1916-1917

There was no registration during WW1.

1918-1928

A single registration was now put in place, with the same rules applying for all elections.

Any man over 21 with six months' residence, or six months' occupation of business premises of £10 annual value within the constituency, or within a neighbouring constituency, could vote. Women aged 30 or over, who were local government electors or the wives of local government electors, were also enfranchised. Some 3 million men and 6 million women were added to the registers, making a total electorate of 21 million.

From 1918 to 1939, arrangements were made for temporary absences to be covered by both postal and proxy voting systems. Members of the armed services are listed twice, both in the normal registers and, with additional information, in separate absent voters lists; in both cases the entry comes under the constituency in which they would normally live.

After 1918, an elector could vote twice if his second vote was under the business or university franchise. The business vote was exercised in the usual constituencies as a vote for owners of businesses in the area if they lived in another constituency. University votes were for university graduates in separate university constituencies; 2 MPs represented all English universities other than Oxford and Cambridge.

In the new combined registers each polling district within the given constituency has a separate section. Information on the civil parish, county council electoral division and, where appropriate, municipal ward in which the properties within the polling district are situated, is provided. Within polling districts, arrangement of the entries was to be, whenever possible, by street order: in practice, for rural areas alphabetical listing by the name of the head of the household persisted. Letter codes and symbols were used to indicate the nature of the qualification to vote: (*R* = Residence Qualification, *N.M.* = Naval or Military Voter, *BP* = Business premises qualification etc.) or the limitations upon the franchise enjoyed ("+" = not entitled to vote in respect of county council elections, etc.). From 1922 liability for jury service

was noted by (*J* or *S.J.*). The registers for 1918 and 1919 displayed the various codes and symbols but tabulated separately those who were only local government electors or only parliamentary electors.

1928-1939

The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928 made the conditions for eligibility the same for women and men and for landowners and tenants. All people over 21 years old could now vote, regardless of property ownership, increasing the electorate to 28.5 million

1940-1944

There was no registration during WW2.

1945-1948

Separate civilian and service registers were compiled in the same way as the earlier absent voters lists.

1949-1974

The abolition of the business and university franchises in 1948 left a system of universal adult suffrage with no one exercising more than one vote.

The few electors not entitled to vote in certain classes of election are indicated in the registers, as are jurors. Each polling district is represented by a separate section of the register. Within a polling district the electorate is generally arranged in alphabetical street order, then by house number.

1975-2002

Electoral registers for 1975-2008 have the catalogue numbers **DC/CI 1/1-272**, and those covering 1975 to 2002 are on microfilms **M67/304-370**.

The boundaries of County Durham were changed in 1974 and urban and rural district councils were replaced by district councils, with the election of district councillors. Registers were compiled by the district councils and organised by polling district as above; most refer to just one constituency but Bishop Auckland constituency, for instance, included Sedgefield, Teesdale and some of Wear Valley District.

2003 to date

Registers from 2003 onwards (including the current register) are subject to tighter legal restrictions than in the past. These have not been microfilmed, cannot be copied, and are only available to be viewed under supervision in the Record Office; these are the full registers not the edited registers.

In 2009, County Durham became a unitary authority as the district councils and county council became one. Registers from 2009 to date are catalogued under **DCC/Res 3/1** and are compiled by constituency.

Sources of inaccuracies in the registers

In the early years, registration cost one shilling, and some did not think it worth the price. Some of those otherwise qualified deliberately chose not to register.

Between the qualifying date and the operative date of the register many voters will have died, and many others will have moved house; the 1878 Parliamentary and Municipal Registration Act allowed data to be transferred every quarter from Registrars of Death to those compiling electoral registers, but this does not seem to have been particularly effective. Correspondingly, individuals will have moved into a constituency after the qualifying date, and be unable to register.

Until 1928, voters who were to reach the qualifying age during a register's currency might not have been found on it.

Rates formerly had to be paid by the qualifying date in order to gain inclusion on the register. If the rate collector died then late collection was inevitable so those paying rates through a landlord instead of directly to the local authority might not be included.

Results of elections

There is no one place where results of elections can be found, but a number of potential sources:

- County or town directories may list MPs, councillors and other dignitaries.
- Newspapers can be a good source of election news.
- There are comprehensive lists of elected MPs on Wikipedia and other websites.
- County councillors are listed in the County Council's yearbooks for 1889-1996 (Q/J/L 13/1/1-28 & 13/2/1-41).
- Durham City Councillors are listed in Durham City Council's yearbooks for 1974-2003 (ND/Du 18/1-26).
- Lists of local councillors can often be found in council minutes.

Electoral records not held by Durham County Record Office

The North Yorkshire Archives holds the electoral registers for Startforth before 1974. Other offices hold those for Blaydon Parliamentary Borough (1971-1974), Darlington County Borough (from 1918), Gateshead County Borough (from 1918), Hartlepool County Borough (from 1918), Jarrow Parliamentary Borough (from 1955), South Shields County Borough (from 1918), Stockton County Borough (from 1918), and Sunderland County Borough (from 1918). These include the absent voters lists for Darlington, Gateshead and Hartlepool; those for South Shields, Stockton and Sunderland are missing.

Registers for borough elections other than for Durham City are also held at other offices. Surviving electoral registers for the boroughs of Gateshead (1832-), Hartlepool (1884-), South Shields (1862-), Stockton (1901-) and Sunderland (1855-) are held elsewhere; those for Blaydon (1970s) are missing.

Constituency boundaries

Each parliamentary reform act either contained provisions for redistributing seats or was followed, in the same Parliament, by a separate act for that purpose. Temporary arrangements for splitting certain populous constituencies were made in 1945 and thereafter a mechanism for regular revisions of constituency boundaries was put in place in order to maintain the rough alignment of constituencies with the number of voters in them. Minor revisions in boundaries became possible by Statutory Instrument in addition to the periodic general revisions.

A town might be a municipal or county borough without being a parliamentary borough (e.g. Jarrow from 1875 to 1955); conversely a town might be a parliamentary borough but not a local government borough (e.g. South Shields from 1832 to 1850) and one parliamentary borough might correspond to two local government boroughs (e.g. The Hartlepoons constituency). A parliamentary borough need not share the boundaries of the local government borough of the same name (e.g. parts of Westoe were incorporated into South Shields County Borough yet remained in Jarrow parliamentary constituency). The apparent continuance of a constituency of a given name may mask radical revisions of its boundaries.

Parliamentary constituencies within County Durham (with notes on other electable bodies)

Italics indicate records held other than at Durham. [*Brackets*] indicate those missing.

1832 - 1867

Durham City (MB from 1835)	Borough
<i>Gateshead</i> (MB from 1835)	Borough
<i>South Shields</i> (MB from 1850)	Borough
<i>Sunderland</i> (MB from 1835)	Borough
Northern Division	County
Southern Division	County

1868 - 1884

[<i>Darlington</i>] (MB from 1867)	Borough
[<i>Durham City</i>]	Borough
[<i>Gateshead</i>]	Borough
[<i>The Hartlepoons</i>] (MB from 1868)	Borough
<i>South Shields</i>	Borough
[<i>Stockton</i>] (MB from 1868)	Borough
<i>Sunderland</i>	Borough
Northern Division	County
Southern Division	County

1885 - 1915

Barnard Castle	County
Bishop Auckland	County
Chester-le-Street	County
[<i>Darlington</i>]*	Borough
[<i>Durham City</i>]*	Borough
[<i>Gateshead</i>] (CB from 1889)	Borough
<i>The Hartlepoons</i> *	Borough
Houghton-le-Spring	County
Jarrow (MB from 1875)	County
Mid-Durham	County
North-Western Durham	County
South-Eastern Durham	County
<i>South Shields</i> (CB from 1889)	Borough
<i>Stockton</i> *	Borough
<i>Sunderland</i> (CB from 1889)	Borough

*NB Borough voters are also included in the county council electoral registers from 1889, except for Gateshead, South Shields and Sunderland.

1894

Start of parish and rural/urban district council elections.

1918 - 1948

Barnard Castle	County
Bishop Auckland	County
Blaydon	County
Chester-le-Street	County
Consett	County
<i>Darlington</i> (CB from 1915)	Borough
Durham	County
<i>Gateshead</i>	Borough
<i>The Hartlepoons</i>	Borough
Houghton-le-Spring	County
Jarrow	County
Seaham	County
Sedgefield	County
<i>South Shields</i>	Borough
Spennymoor	County
<i>Stockton-on-Tees</i>	Borough
<i>Sunderland</i>	Borough

1949 - 1970

Bishop Auckland	County
Blaydon	County
Chester-le-Street	County
Consett	County
<i>Darlington</i>	Borough
Durham	County
Easington	County
<i>Gateshead East</i>	Borough
<i>Gateshead West</i>	Borough
<i>The Hartlepoons</i>	Borough
Houghton-le-Spring	County
<i>Jarrow</i> (Borough from 1955)	County
North West Durham	County
Sedgefield	County
<i>South Shields</i>	Borough
<i>Stockton-on-Tees</i>	Borough
<i>Sunderland North</i>	Borough
<i>Sunderland South</i>	Borough

1971 - 1974

Bishop Auckland	County
[<i>Blaydon</i>]	Borough
Chester-le-Street	County
Consett	County
<i>Darlington</i>	Borough
Durham	County
Easington	County
<i>Gateshead East</i>	Borough
<i>Gateshead West</i>	Borough

<i>Hartlepool</i>	Borough
Houghton-le-Spring	County
<i>Jarrow</i>	Borough
North West Durham	County
Sedgefield	County
<i>South Shields</i>	Borough
<i>Stockton-on-Tees</i>	Borough
<i>Sunderland North</i>	Borough
<i>Sunderland South</i>	Borough

1974

Rural/urban districts were replaced by district councils.

Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees moved into the new Cleveland County while Blaydon, Gateshead, Houghton-le-Spring, Jarrow (South Tyneside), South Shields and Sunderland moved into the new Tyne and Wear area.

The Startforth area in the North Riding of Yorkshire was added to County Durham.

1975 - 1983

Bishop Auckland	County
Chester-le-Street	County
<i>Darlington</i>	Borough
Durham City	County
Easington	County
North West Durham	County

1983 - 2008

Bishop Auckland	County
<i>Darlington</i>	Borough
Durham City	County
Easington	County
North Durham	County
North West Durham	County
Sedgefield	County

1997

Darlington became a unitary authority

2009

The County Council and District Councils were absorbed into the new Durham County Unitary Authority

2009 to date

Bishop Auckland	County
City of Durham	County
<i>Darlington</i>	Borough
Easington	County
North Durham	County
North West Durham	County
Sedgefield	County