



Electoral Registers (Parliamentary Elections)

Background to Electoral Registers

Electoral registers are a useful source for local and family historians as they list persons eligible to vote in Parliamentary elections by their place of residence or address. Registers have been compiled annually since 1832. Until 1974, the registers were compiled for each Parliamentary Constituency or Division in the county. Thereafter, they were compiled by the Electoral Registration Officer for the appropriate District Council and the registers follow local authority, rather than Parliamentary boundaries.

Northumberland Archives holds Electoral Registers for Northumberland and parts of North Tyneside (that previously formed part of the county of Northumberland). Please note that there can be gaps in the series and date coverage of the various constituencies can vary. For some places, electoral records have not survived at all and for others, for example Morpeth and Ashington, there are large gaps in the series. Registers for Parliamentary Boroughs on Tyneside (Newcastle, Wallsend and Tynemouth) are not held by Northumberland Archives.

The boundaries of parliamentary divisions and constituencies have changed over the years. This has reflected the change in the franchise in order to produce fair representation. Part of this system was to create equal constituencies in terms of population size and abolishing university seats and seats for places that no longer existed. Therefore it is possible that a town moved between constituencies.

Entitlement to vote was very limited throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until the late nineteenth century, the qualification for voting was generally linked to ownership of land. In 1918 this qualification was removed, so that by 1969 the right to vote was granted to all men and women over the age of 18. A summary of eligibility for boroughs and counties follows:

	Boroughs	Counties outside boroughs	Comments
Pre-1832	Boroughs always elected their own MP(s) – the qualification varied from borough to borough	Counties outside boroughs were always represented separately. The county franchise was based on ownership of freehold land assessed as worth 40 shillings or more to	In 1831, on the eve of the Reform Act, about 478,000 men (out of a population aged 21 or over in England and Wales of ten million) had any say in the choice of their MP – perhaps 1 in 10
1832	The traditional franchise of each borough continued, with the addition of householders (i.e. occupier, whether owner or tenant) of property assessed as worth £10 a year	Freeholders with property worth 40s a year. Copyholders renting property at £10 a year. £10 leaseholders with at least 60 year leases. £50 leaseholders with at least 20 years leases. Any tenant paying more than £50 a year	By 1833, about 814,000 voters – richer industrialists merchants and substantial farmers Voters – 1 man in 7
1867	Every adult male householder resident for a year and heads of families lodging in unfurnished rooms paying £10 a year in rent	Any owner or leaseholder or property rated at £5 a year, or tenant of property rated at £12 a year	1,430,000 in 1866 2,500,000 in 1868 This now included most working men in towns and cities but excluded rural labourers Voters - 1 man in 3
1884	No change	Same voting qualifications as granted to the boroughs in 1867	3,200,000 in 1883 5,900,000 in 1885 Most rural labourers now received the vote but still excluded were heads of households who shared houses; adult males living with parent(s); soldiers in barracks; and women Voters 2 men in 3
1918	All males over 21 (residents or owners); women over 30 who were householders or wives of householders – 6 women in 10 Plural voting was limited to one residential and one business or university qualification (previously a man could vote in any constituency where he met the property qualification)		
1928	Every resident or owner over 21		97% of the population
1948	Abolition of business/non-resident ownership vote and university seats		
1969	Everybody over 18		

Before 1832

England has been divided into parliamentary constituencies since medieval times. Until 1832 each English county formed a Constituency and from 1429 all men over 21 years of age who owned freehold land of an annual value of 40 shillings or more. In cities and boroughs, the right to vote depended on local custom. The Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 divided the counties into two or more constituencies and therefore, the number of MPs for each county varied. This provided a fairer system of representation and better reflected the population distribution throughout the country. Electoral registers were introduced through the 1832 Act.

Prior to this, Poll Books listed the men who were entitled to vote and the candidates for whom they voted. Until 1872 men voted in public until the secret ballot was introduced. The books usually list the names of electors, their parish of residence and the candidate for which they voted. The full address of the voter could be included and, if different the address of the property which gave him the right to vote. The list of electors may be arranged by parish, hundred or township. Very few Poll Books survive for the period prior to 1696. From 1711, Poll books were required to be deposited with the Clerk of the Peace.

Poll books held by Northumberland Archives

Poll Books for Northumberland

Reference	Covering dates	Area
ZMD 35	1747-1748, 1774, 1826	Northumberland
SANT/GEN/ELE/1/ 3/1	1698	Northumberland
NRO 05289/1	1832	South Division Northumberland
NRO 05289/2	1841	North Division Northumberland
NRO 00524/7	1826.	Northumberland (contested)
NRO 00524/8	1852	South Northumberland
SANT/GEN/ELE/1/ 1/4	1722	Northumberland
ZBS/3/5	1830	Coquetdale and Glendale wards
PBN/1	1710; 1721; 1734	Northumberland
PBN/2	1715	Northumberland
PBN/3	1774	Northumberland
PBN/4	1826	Northumberland
PBN/5	1747-1748, 1774, 1826	Northumberland
PBN/6	1714; 1722; 1734; 1841	Northumberland
PBN/7	1852	Northumberland
SANT/GEN/ELE/1/ 4 April 1722/23	4 April 1722/23	Newcastle-upon-Tyne

2/1		
ZRI 25/8	1780	Newcastle-upon-Tyne (amended)
ZRI 25/41	1820	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
ZRI 25/70	1835	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
ZMD 103	1834	Northumberland
ZMI B16/3a	1818	Northumberland
NRO 650/C/30	1698	Northumberland
NRO 404/349	1842	Chollerton
1DE/7/122	Early 18 th century	Morpeth
1DE/7/119-122	1698 & 1705	Northumberland
ZMD 167/26	1747/48	Northumberland (Knight of the Shire)
SANT/BEQ/5/6/3	1820	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
ZAL 92/4	1748	Morpeth
NRO 1100/170	1710; 1721; 1734	Northumberland

Poll Books for County Durham

M. 45 (microfilm)	1675-1680	Durham
ZRI 25/19b	1802	Durham (amended)

After 1832

The Parliamentary boundaries covered by the Electoral Registers collection include:

Date	County Divisions	Parliamentary Boroughs
1832-1884	North	Berwick-upon-Tweed
1832-1884	South	Morpeth Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tynemouth
1885-1918	Berwick-upon-Tweed Hexham Tyneside Wansbeck	Morpeth Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tynemouth
1919-1948	Berwick-upon-Tweed Hexham Wansbeck	Morpeth Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tynemouth Wallsend
1949 onwards	Constituencies	
	Berwick-upon-Tweed Blyth (later known as Blyth Valley) Hexham Morpeth (known as Wansbeck from 1984) Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tynemouth Wallsend	

From 1974 electoral registers usually cover the area served by a District Council rather than an electoral area. For Northumberland, these are as follows:

Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale, Wansbeck.

Searching the Registers

When searching the registers, the first step is to identify the place in which you are interested in the alphabetical place name list at the front of our electoral registers catalogue. This will indicate within which Parliamentary Constituency the place is contained. The alphabetical place name list will also highlight any gaps in the series or changes of constituency.

Summary of Registers held

Constituency	Reference	Covering dates
Northumberland North	QRE/1	1832 - 1885
Northumberland South	QRE/2	1832 - 1885
Northumberland North & South	QRE/3	1832 - 1833
Berwick-upon-Tweed	ER/1	1885 - 2003
Blyth	ER/2	1969 - 2007
Blyth Borough Records	NRO 880/156-199a	1949 - 1974
Hexham	ER/3	1885 - 2003
Morpeth	ER/4	1949 - 1983
Tyneside	ER/5	1885 - 1915
Wansbeck	ER/6	1885 - 2003
County Council Elections	ER/7	1889 - 1915

Until 1918, electoral registers listed the names of electors, their addresses and the nature of their entitlement to vote. Sometimes separate registers for owners and occupiers were kept. Earlier nineteenth century registers listed voters in alphabetical order by surname, however, as the electorate expanded, registers were later compiled in order of electoral ward. This became the standard format from 1918.

Absent Voters Lists 1918-1939

Absent voters lists have survived for Berwick-upon-Tweed, Hexham, Tynedale and Wansbeck Parliamentary Constituencies. These consist of thin, paper-backed pamphlets for the years 1919-1939 and hard-backed volumes for the years 1918-1919. They give name, address, rank and regiment of the absent voter. Digital copies of Absent Voters Lists are available to purchase.

Northumberland Archives is committed to providing a quality service to all its users and therefore this information is also available in Large Print and via the Internet. The Internet address is

www.northumberlandarchives.com

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