

Glamorgan Archives

~ELECTORAL REGISTERS~

Electoral registers are lists of those eligible to vote in parliamentary and local government elections. The registers are most frequently used to:

- Discover how long families were resident at an address
- Find out the number of people in a household who were eligible to vote
- Locate missing individuals

What do they contain?

Before 1918 the registers list the names of electors in alphabetical order, along with their residential address and details of the qualification entitling them to vote (for example, a dwelling house, offices, land and tenements).

From 1918 the standard arrangement became to compile registers by street within each constituency and polling district. The qualification to vote was indicated, either:

- Residence (R)
- Business premises (B.P)
- Occupation (O)
- Occupation of husband (H.O)
- Naval or military voter (N.M)

Who could vote and when?

Registers of parliamentary electors were first compiled under the 1832 Representation of the People Act, and have been compiled annually since then (with the exception of 1916-1917 and 1940-1944).

It is important to remember that the lists contain only the names of those eligible to vote, and it was not until 1928 that everyone over 21 finally had the right to vote.

Throughout the 19th century, a number of Acts of Parliament increased the numbers of those entitled to vote from a very small minority of property-owning individuals to a larger proportion of the population. However, the right to vote was still based on a property qualification, and even in the early years of the 20th century only 60% of the adult male population was entitled to vote; women were not entitled to vote at all in parliamentary elections until 1918.

From as early as 1429, the right to vote had been given to all men of 21 or over who held freehold lands or tenements worth 40 shillings or more. In borough elections, the qualification to vote varied according to local tradition. The 1832 Act began the process of standardising the franchise:

- *Representation of the People Act, 1832* – Enfranchised men over the age of 21 who owned property worth at least £2 a year, generally middle-class males.
- *Representation of the People Act, 1867* – Expanded the vote to men owning or renting property worth at least £5 per year, which included skilled workers and craftsmen, and some tenant farmers.

- *Representation of the People Act, 1884* – Extended the right to vote to include men who owned or lodged in property worth at least £10 a year; this enfranchised rural labourers.
- *Representation of the People Act, 1918* – This Act allowed a far greater percentage of the population to vote. It permitted men over 21 who had resided in the constituency for more than 6 months to vote, thus extending the vote to the majority of males. Women aged 30 could vote only if they were householders or married to a householder.
- *Equal Franchise Act, 1928* – Allowed women the same voting rights as men. All men and women over 21 were able to vote.
- *Representation of the People Act, 1969* – Lowered the legal voting age from 21 to 18 (although the changes do not appear until the 1971 registers).

Adults not qualified to vote

Although the percentage of the population that was eligible to vote continued to grow throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were still groups in society and people with certain occupations who were unable to vote, and as such would not appear in electoral registers. They include:

- Peers of the Realm
- Aliens, unless they had become British citizens
- Until 1887, those serving as policemen were ineligible
- Postmasters, who could not vote until 1918
- Anyone serving a prison sentence
- Idiots and lunatics
- Conscientious objectors, 1918-1923
- Anybody else not satisfying voting conditions at the time

Absent Voters

People who were not in their constituency at the time of an election are known as “Absent Voters”; the largest such group were members of the armed services. Lists of Absent Voters were produced for some constituencies during the First World War, but none are held in the Record Office. Between 1945 and 1948, service registers were produced alongside those for civilians.

ELECTORAL REGISTERS AT THE GLAMORGAN ARCHIVES

The Glamorgan Archives holds electoral registers for the old county of Glamorgan from c.1840 to 1974, although there are gaps in the series.

Registers for the areas covered by former administrative counties of Mid and South Glamorgan are held for the years 1974 to present. Those for West Glamorgan from 1974 onwards are held by the West Glamorgan Archive Service in Swansea.

Until 1974 there were two types of franchise, that of the Borough and that of the County. Therefore there are two separate series of registers:

Registers for the County of Glamorgan

The Glamorgan series includes the names of voters eligible to vote for members of parliament for the County of Glamorgan.

Registers for Boroughs

From 1832, the towns of Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil returned their own members to parliament separately from those for the county, and the lists of electors in these boroughs form separate series. The boroughs of Aberdare and Rhondda were similarly excluded from the county series from 1914/15 until 1974 having gained the powers of a parliamentary borough.

The division of the County and Borough series ends after the 1974 local government reorganisation, following which the registers are arranged according to local authority.

Our holdings for the boroughs of Aberdare, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda, both as part of the main series and as separate series, are incomplete and can be summarised as follows:

Aberdare	1840-1910, 1913, 1931-1937, 1939, 1945-1974
Cardiff	1949-1950, 1952, 1955, 1957, 1959-1974
Merthyr Tydfil	1840-1907, 1918, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954-55, 1959-1974
Rhondda	1840-1914, 1950-1974

Some of the registers for the county boroughs that are *not* held at the Glamorgan Archives are available at the following locations:

Aberdare Borough:

Aberdare Library,
Green Street, Aberdare,
CF44 7AG

01685 880050
aberdare.library@rhondda-cynon-
taf.gov.uk

Merthyr Tydfil Borough:

Merthyr Tydfil Library,
High Street, Merthyr Tydfil,
CF47 8AF

01685 723057
library.services@merthyr.
gov.uk

Swansea Borough:

West Glamorgan Archive Service,
County Hall,
Oystermouth Road, Swansea,
SA1 3SN

01792 636589
archives@swansea.gov.uk

Cardiff Borough:

Cardiff Central Library,
John Street
Cardiff
CF10 5BA

029 2038 2116
centrallibrary@cardiff.gov.uk

Rhondda Borough:

Treorchy Library
Station Road, Treorchy,
CF42 6NN

01443 773204/ 773592
Treorchy.library@rhondda-cynon-
taff.gov.uk

Format of the Registers of Electors

The ways in which the registers of electors were arranged altered periodically, according to the changes in local government. This table illustrates the format of the registers at a given date, and will help when ordering volumes in the searchroom:

1840-1885	1 volume for each year covering the whole county of Glamorgan.
1886-1888	3 volumes for each year, dividing the county into 5 divisions: Eastern, Southern, Mid, Gower and Rhondda.
1889-1914	2 volumes for each year arranged roughly in alphabetical order by electoral district. They cover the county and some boroughs. <i>Except: 1889, 1894-95, 1914: these are bound in 4-6 volumes and divided into Eastern, Southern, Western, Mid and Rhondda divisions.</i>

1915-1917	No registers were produced, with the exception of one for the Southern Division of Glamorgan in 1915.
1918-1974	<p>7 volumes for each year for the Glamorgan constituency, covering the divisions:</p> <p>Aberavon Llandaff and Barry Ogmore Caerphilly Neath Pontypridd Gower</p> <p>Between 1919 and 1926, registers were produced twice a year. Between 1940 and 1944, no registers were produced.</p> <p>Registers for Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea, Aberdare and Rhondda boroughs (where available) are bound separately.</p>
1974-1978	<p>12 volumes for each year, covering the divisions:</p> <p>Aberdare Cardiff Merthyr Tydfil Ogwr Rhondda Rhymney Valley Taff Ely Vale of Glamorgan</p>
1979-1996	<p>Volumes for each year cover the local authority areas as follows:</p> <p>Cardiff City Cynon Valley Borough Merthyr Tydfil Borough Ogwr Borough Rhondda Borough Rhymney Valley District Taff-Ely Borough Vale of Glamorgan Borough</p>

1997-present	<p>Volumes for each year cover the local authority areas as follows:</p> <p>Bridgend County Borough (CB) to 2001 Caerphilly CB Cardiff City and County (to 2002 <i>only</i>) Merthyr Tydfil CB Rhondda Cynon Taf CB Vale of Glamorgan CB</p>
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Additional information

A note about Penarth...

The Penarth area may be included in the Glamorgan registers or the Cardiff Borough registers, depending upon the date. It is included in the Glamorgan Register until 1914, but from 1918 to 1970, it is part of the Cardiff constituency, and included in the register for Cardiff South East. From 1971, Penarth can be found in the registers for the Barry division.

A note about Cardiff...

The following areas of Cardiff were at various dates outside Cardiff County Borough, and therefore included in the Llandaff & Barry Division of the Glamorgan series (the date in brackets indicates when the area became part of the county borough):

Birchgrove (1922)	Lisvane (1974)	Maindy (1922)
Ely (1922)	Llandaff 1922)	Penylan (1922)
Fairwater (1922)	Llandaff North (1922)	Rhiwbina (1967)
Rumney (1938)	St Mellons (1974)	Whitchurch (1967)

University Voters

As well as the main series of registers, the Archives also hold the University of Wales Register of Electors for Parliamentary Elections, 1938

Qualification Dates

The year given on an electoral register relates to the year in which it came into force, whereas the qualifying date for inclusion in the register was usually in the previous year. For genealogists, the qualifying date is the most important as it establishes ownership, occupancy, or residence at a particular address on or before that date. Many voters may have died or moved on by the time the register came into force.

The table below gives details of the main changes to qualifying dates and the date registers came into force:

From	Qualifying Date	Date coming into force
1832	31 July	1 December
1843	31 July	30 November
1867	31 July	1 January
1878	15 July	1 January
1885	31 July	1 January
1918	15 January & 15 July	15 April & 15 October
1926	15 July	15 October
1928	1 December	1 May 1929
1929	1 June	15 October
1948	20 November & 15 June	16 March & 1 October
1949	20 November	16 March
1953	10 October	16 February

Earlier lists of voters

Lists of Freeholders

From the 1536 Act of Union, Glamorgan was represented in parliament by one MP, elected by the freeholders in the county. The lists of freeholders are arranged by hundred, and then by parish, and contain only the names of those eligible to vote for the Glamorgan representative.

The following lists are held at the record office:

- List of freeholders, 1772 (DXGC265/2)
- Poll of Freeholders of Glamorgan, 1744/5 (DXGC265)
- Alphabetical list of Freeholders in Glamorgan, 1820 (Q/D/R4)
- Alphabetical list of voters in the county, post 1819 (Q/D/R5)

Poll Books

Poll books were produced to show publicly the votes cast in parliamentary elections. They contain lists of voters in a given election, usually accompanied by details of their residence and occupation. They can also indicate for which candidate they voted. However, they only include those who actually used their vote, rather than all those eligible.

The Archives hold Poll books for the following elections:

- County Elections, 1756 (Q/D/R1)
- County Elections, 1820 (Q/D/R2)
- Cardiff Elections, 1820 (Q/D/R3)
- Poll book for the election of MP for Borough of Cardiff and contributory boroughs of Cowbridge and Llantrisant, November 1868 (DX400/2)