

ELECTORAL REGISTERS

Electoral registers are a useful resource for the local and family historian alike, and are particularly useful to discover changes in occupation of a house. The West Glamorgan Archive Service does not hold a complete set of electoral registers for the whole of the West Glamorgan area: there is a partial coverage for all areas, but, depending on the dates you are interested in, it may be necessary to look elsewhere to find the registers you need. This leaflet is intended as a guide to which electoral registers are available at the Archive Service and where else to look for further information.

What are electoral registers and what information do they hold?

Electoral registers were kept from 1832 onwards, and contain names and addresses of those eligible to vote in local or parliamentary elections. There are two basic types: one (sometimes known as a burgess roll) records names of those eligible to vote in the election of local councillors. These were generally produced by the relevant borough. The other type record those able to vote in parliamentary elections, and were generally prepared on a county basis.

Electoral registers do not contain a complete list of inhabitants, but a record of those registered to vote. Some groups of people are not eligible to vote, and consequently cannot appear in the registers: these include peers, prisoners, conscientious objectors, lunatics, foreign subjects, postmasters (until 1918), and policemen (until 1887). Women were not able to vote in parliamentary elections until 1918. Likewise, before 1918 there were property qualifications for voting and electoral registers before that date often recorded the address of a relevant qualifying property as well as the individual's address. Over the years there were changes in eligibility for voting and consequently in the proportion of the population recorded in electoral registers. In the early 20th century the electorate consisted of only about 60% of the adult male population. The various measures which affected the franchise are as follows:

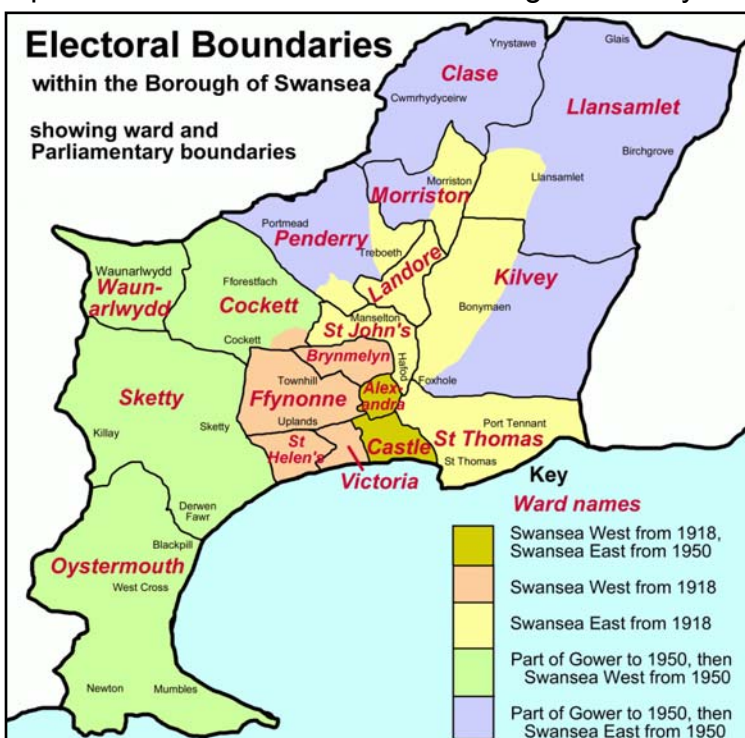
- The Representation of the People Act, 1832 gave the vote to men over 21 who owned property worth an annual rent of £2 or more.
- The 1867 Reform Act extended the franchise to male owners of property worth £5 *per annum* and tenants paying £12 *per annum*.
- In 1884 the franchise was extended further to include all male householders and lodgers paying £10 per annum.
- The Representation of the People Act of 1918 introduced a universal male franchise and included women over 30.
- In 1928 the female qualifying age was reduced to 21.
- In 1969 the qualifying age was reduced to 18 for both men and women.

Swansea electoral registers

When Swansea first began to elect its own MPs, the borough (and consequently the contents of the electoral registers) was much smaller than today. The area covered included the town centre, westwards to Brynmill and northwards to Townhill, St Thomas, Hafod, Landore, Morrision and Eastside. When the borough gained an extra MP in 1884-5 this area was divided into two constituencies – Swansea District (Landore, Morrision and St John’s wards) and Swansea Town (Alexandra, Brynmelyn, Castle, Ffynone, St Helen’s and Victoria wards, and the Eastside and St Thomas areas, which were then called East Ward).

In 1918 Swansea County Borough was greatly extended to take in outlying areas such as Sketty, Fforestfach, Ynystawe, Oystermouth and Birchgrove. At the same time, two new constituencies were created, called Swansea East and Swansea West, as depicted on the map below. However, the two new constituencies included, broadly speaking, the same area as the Town and District constituencies. The majority of the post-1918 borough remained within the Gower constituency.

Up to 1930 Swansea electoral registers only include lists of voters in the



Swansea constituencies, which means that areas such as Oystermouth and Sketty are omitted, because they lay within the Gower constituency, despite being within Swansea County Borough boundaries. However, from 1930 onwards the registers start to include those parts of Swansea Borough that lay within the Gower constituency. It should be noted however that the constituency boundaries did not necessarily adhere neatly to ward boundaries and, as the map shows, many wards were split between

two parliamentary constituencies. In 1950 there was a major reorganisation of electoral boundaries in the West Glamorgan area. As part of this, the boundaries of Swansea East and Swansea West constituencies were altered to take in the whole of the county borough in approximately equal proportions. The southern half of Oystermouth ward was transferred back to Gower constituency during the 1980s.

Where else to find electoral registers

Neath Library holds electoral registers for the borough of Neath, 1881, 1889-90, 1893-1894, 1933, 1946-47, 1962, 1964-1966, 1968-1973, 1977-1980, 1983-1996

The Glamorgan Record Office holds a complete set of electoral registers for the county of Glamorgan. These are arranged by constituency, and within that by ward (usually parish). Further details are available on their website, www.glamro.gov.uk, including a leaflet about electoral registers, which is available at <http://www.glamro.gov.uk/adobe/Electors.pdf>.

West Glamorgan Archive Service

*A joint service for the City and County of Swansea
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