

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

1.7 DESCRIPTIVE TERMINOLOGY

Some terminology is potentially ambiguous, so the website team has made the following choices, which are adopted throughout the website:

1.7.1 Naming the urban areas within greater London

Use of the term ‘London’ is apt to be confusing, since it does not distinguish between the City of London proper, its wider metropolitan region, and its parliamentary constituency. In the text that follows, **‘the metropolis’** is taken to mean the built-up region of London, Middlesex, and urban north-east Surrey, approximating to the post-1832 parliamentary constituencies of the City of London, Westminster, Marylebone, Finsbury, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, and Lambeth. This built-up region was, of course, considerably larger in 1850 than it had been in 1700. Meanwhile the **‘City of London’** is a geographical expression referring to the Square Mile (itself divided into intramural and extramural wards, and further divided into parishes and precincts). Its parliamentary constituency is simply called **‘London’**.

A further confusion may arise because some London wards are named after thoroughfares. To clarify matters, in the text (though not in summary tables in 8.3) the wards of London are always designated thus: Lime Street ward.

Westminster claimed the status of a city by ancient usage, and **‘Westminster’** means the parliamentary constituency of ‘the city and liberties of Westminster’. For obvious reasons, the use of ‘Westminster’ to mean the legislature is avoided. The City of Westminster was divided into parishes, themselves further divided into wards.

‘Marylebone’ indicates the parliamentary constituency, divided into parishes, electoral registration districts, and rate-collectors’ divisions. Meanwhile ‘St Marylebone’ indicates a parish within that constituency.

1.7.2 Naming Londoners

The aggregate term '**Londoners**' is taken to mean all the inhabitants of the metropolis; while the inhabitants of the City of London are termed '**City of Londoners**' or otherwise evoked in a descriptive phrase. Those who were eligible to vote under the City of London's pre-1832 non-residential franchise are described as '**liverymen**'. Many of these were locally resident as Londoners, while others lived in nearby counties.

The London livery companies are capitalised: thus 'Joiner' indicates a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Joiners, whilst a 'joiner' indicates a member of an occupational group. The annual assembly on Midsummer Day of these London liverymen to elect their sheriffs, their chamberlain, their bridge masters, their aleconners (inspectors of ale), and their auditors, and the assembly on Michaelmas Day to select a short-list of candidates for the lord mayor, is known as **Common Hall**.

There is no convenient short-hand expression for the inhabitants of Middlesex, Westminster, or Marylebone. They are therefore evoked by descriptive phrases.

1.7.3 Naming electors and voters

The use of the term '**electors**' indicates those who were eligible to vote, while all references to '**voters**' indicate those who actually exercised their right to vote. The act of recorded open voting is known by the contemporary verb '**to poll**'. When polling, a voter might bestow more than one vote. Thus, the number of votes (N) cast in an election commonly exceeded the number of voters counted in the 'poll' - a noun that signified a count of heads. As statisticians might put it, *Sigma* is greater than or equal to N [$\Sigma \geq N$].

1.7.4 Naming political affiliations

Candidates did not officially contest parliamentary elections under **party labels** until 1969, and in the period 1700-1850 the use of party labels in elections was consciously disavowed, although political groupings were far from unknown. For the purposes of the LED, no formal party allegiance has been attributed to any candidate, because such attributions would prejudice the outcome of many interesting areas of research enquiry. Instead, users of the LED may investigate for themselves. To

aid that process, full details of the literature relating to each election are provided in the relevant sections within the website.

Where contemporary accounts in the eighteenth century refer to **Whig** (broadly reformist) and **Tory** (Church and King) allegiances these terms are retained in the supporting documentation; and, when appropriate, politicians who were perceived as supporting the government of the day (as the King's ministry) are described as **Administration** candidates.

Similarly, references in the nineteenth century to **Conservative**, **Whig**, **Liberal**, **Radical**, **Chartist**, or **Independent** (no party) are retained as used in the original documentation.

1.7.5 Identifying elections

Parliamentary **general elections**, held on a general writ addressed to all constituencies, are identified by the year in which the returns were made (except in 1701, when two general elections are differentiated by month and year).

Parliamentary **by-elections**, held on a specific writ addressed to one constituency following a vacancy (for example, following a death, or elevation to the peerage, or *de facto* resignation) are identified by the month and year of the return. Although the term 'by-election' is technically an anachronism in this period, being first recorded in 1880, it is too useful to discard.

Some genuine conflicts in representation as well as many unanimous selections were resolved by the simple **show of hands**. However, candidates are said to have '**contested**' an election only if and when matters went beyond that stage to the taking of a poll (open vote), even if this poll was attenuated.

1.7.6 Identifying MPs

Successful candidates are given the suffix **MP**, while those who were successful but chose to sit for another constituency, as was done not infrequently pre-1832, are noted simply as '**returned**'. Those who, perhaps after a disappointing canvass, withdrew before the poll began are deemed not to have been candidates.

Lastly, a candidate who represented a constituency at the time of the dissolution of parliament is described as the '**incumbent**' **MP**, although

technically the status of MP was terminated at the dissolution. On the same principle, an MP who was returned at successive elections for the same constituency is deemed to have sat without a break.

1.7.7 The nature of polling

To poll means to cast and register a vote or votes in an election, as opposed to the less formalised show of hands.

The poll refers to the number of votes cast and recorded, while in plural form it may also refer to the place where votes are cast, as in 'going to the polls'.

Non-contested elections may therefore take place without a poll.