

# **LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY**

## **1.9 OVERVIEW – METROPOLITAN ELECTIONS**

*Proto-democracy* is the appropriate term to encapsulate the electoral experience of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century metropolitan London, at a time when the metropolis was growing rapidly – and had already become one of the largest cities in the world.<sup>1</sup> There was extensive, though not universal, popular participation by the adult male population in the official electoral processes, undertaken to choose public representatives to serve in parliament and in a range of civic offices for a specified term.

Reference to proto-democracy does not imply that the later coming of complete adult suffrage was inevitable. Nor is it intended to imply that formal democracy was or is a perfect culmination of history. Neither of those propositions is argued within this website. Some constitutional traditions have been aborted. And some nominally democratic systems have been perverted.

The concept of proto-democracy is, however, vital to highlight an under-appreciated truth about one specific case-history – that of Britain's mixed constitution before parliamentary reform in 1832. Some constituencies were undoubtedly oligarchic, where political participation was confined to the few, and sometimes to the very few.<sup>2</sup> These were the scandals upon which the political reformers justly concentrated their polemical fire. In particular, Charles Dickens satirised the 'bad old' Eatanswill boroughs of England with such lethal comedy<sup>3</sup> that their reputation for corrupt practices and meaningless, drink-driven partisanship is commonly taken to represent the pre-1832 electorate in its entirety. Yet there were also a number of large popular constituencies, where the state of play was quite different. Their alternative experiences are known in outline but have been insufficiently appreciated.

Across eighteenth-century London in particular, there was a political culture of electoral participation which was not confined purely to

elections for parliament but which extended to a startling range of elections for civic and parochial positions. This participatory world was so intensive and sustained that it deserves the name of proto-democracy.<sup>4</sup>

To substantiate this claim, a new database has been compiled that documents some half a million surviving individual-level records of votes cast in a wide range of local and parliamentary elections across London between 1700 and 1850.<sup>5</sup> Therein are the details of all named electors, their addresses, their occupations or livery companies, as well as their individual electoral choices.<sup>6</sup> And the database would have been yet fuller, had full records survived for all the contests that are known to have taken place within London in this period.<sup>7</sup> The LED tally of half a million votes cast is therefore a minimum.

In addition to the LED, a contextual resource has also been created, in the form of the Metropolitan Polls in section 8. These indicate the summary results of all 873 recorded contests within metropolitan London in the years between 1700 and 1852 which have been discovered by research to date. This evidence points to at least a further half million or so recorded voting acts within this timespan. These votes were cast in response not only to parliamentary contests but also to electoral struggles over a range of civic posts, both major and minor. Much of this cornucopia of psephological data has hitherto been overlooked by historians.

Specifically, the recorded evidence from 873 metropolitan election contests between 1700 and 1852 breaks down as follows: 174 recorded parliamentary contests within the metropolis between 1700 and 1852;<sup>8</sup> 93 recorded contests for municipal posts in the City of London between 1700 and 1832;<sup>9</sup> 595 recorded contests for London wardmote posts such as common councilman, alderman, or beadle over the same timespan;<sup>10</sup> and a further 11 recorded contests within Middlesex for the post of coroner between 1733 and 1830.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, it is worth noting once more that much electoral information from the period between 1700 and 1850 is irretrievably lost. A relatively small proportion of elections was determined by a poll; and, of those that were so determined, a relatively small proportion of poll books have survived, especially relating to the early eighteenth century. Such lacunae make those data, which have survived and now been amalgamated together for the first time, even more important for historians.

When assessing the scale of election participation, however, it

should be stressed that all aggregate figures about the scale of voting refer to the number of votes, rather than the number of voters. Some individuals went to the polls in successive elections (and their voting careers can be traced accordingly),<sup>12</sup> while electors in multi-member constituencies (like Westminster and the City of London) were entitled to more than one vote apiece.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the records do amount to considerably more than half a million historical ‘facts’. Not only do most entries contain more than one item of information but, additionally, when two or more records refer to the same individual, then this information itself constitutes a further fact.

Individual-level details about named voters are exceptionally significant for electoral analysis, since so much historical information relating to elections is available only in aggregated form. Even in the twenty-first century, when documentation about individuals tends to be much richer, individual voter’s electoral choices remain completely secret; and indeed much other information is subject to data protection legislation.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, much of the data about London’s electors in this period relate to identifiable people as they exercised their political choice from the options presented to them. Voting decisions can thus be analysed individually and in aggregate. Moreover, the focus for study can be short-term or longitudinal or both, hence allowing historians to study individuals, groups, and any wider trends that emerge to throw light upon what T.S. Eliot once invoked as history’s ‘vast impersonal forces’.<sup>15</sup>

In this period, the metropolitan electors were predominantly men of ‘middling’ and skilled craftsman status, making them not yet a mass electorate but very much more than a tiny aristocratic elite. Their voting experiences demonstrated the noisy reality of subjecting MPs, and other civic officials, to the discipline of an election, when the powerful went cap in hand to solicit the support of those who had less power but were not powerless. Awareness of the role of regular elections, even under the unsystematic eighteenth-century constitution, meant that the 1832 extension of voting to new people and places could be defended as practical and sensible rather than wild and anarchic. ‘Look at the metropolitan districts!’ urged the Whig orator Thomas Babington Macaulay approvingly in 1831, when speaking in parliament to reassure the faint-hearts that non-elite voters were used to acting responsibly.<sup>16</sup> The live constitutionalist or proto-democratic tradition meant that the

reforms of 1832, although furiously debated, were implemented with notable ease, once the case for change was agreed.

Yet the importance of the electoral experience of metropolitan London in this period lay not only in what followed but also in its meaning in its own time. In effect, the contested elections in the large constituencies were intensive tests of public opinion *before* the advent of opinion polls, as they registered in a series of open votes the outcomes of local trials of strength between rival political parties or interest groups. Furthermore, the publication of the poll books, as well as the collections of electoral squibs, songs, and caricatures, indicate that the process was a highly self-conscious one. Far from all Londoners were voters but the principles and practices of voting were normalised and publicised across the metropolis.

The metropolitan electoral evidence thus reveals an entire political culture, with its own customs and conventions, as it was formed and transmitted from generation to generation. By putting this proto-democratic constitutionalist tradition under the microscope, the historical study of electioneering is located within the social and economic realities of metropolitan urban history; and London life is equally located within national political history. What it facilitates is nothing less than the social history of politics.

Moreover, any view that the electoral framework was rigidly fixed, either before or after 1832, is shown to be erroneous. In fact, this study documents the continuous adaptations and lively contests that sprang from constitutionalism in action and in dispute.

### **1.9.1 Electoral rules in metropolitan London, 1700-1850**

D.C. North's depiction of institutions as custodians of 'the rules of the game in society' has been both powerful and persuasive.<sup>17</sup> Few factors are as important as electoral rules in determining who should represent a constituency. These rules may be considered under three heads: eligibility to stand as a candidate; eligibility to vote for a candidate; and rules concerning the mechanism of voting. This brief treatment of electoral rules includes both formally enacted rules and informal customs that could be yet more binding.<sup>18</sup>

Regulating the membership of the House of Commons was a jealously guarded privilege of that House.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, after the Last Determinations Act (1725) the Commons' right to be the sole arbiter of what constituted

the right of election in each constituency was statutorily confirmed.<sup>20</sup> If few formal rules governed who was eligible to stand as a candidate, this was because the Commons considered each case upon its merits before deciding which candidate was entitled to take his seat. Constituencies might return whomsoever they wished: but only the Commons could decide if he could become an MP. At once, the male pronoun strikes a discordant note. But whether by formal rule or informal custom, it was inconceivable in this period that a woman could become a member of the House of Commons.<sup>21</sup> The prohibition stemmed from the assumption that women's interests would be safeguarded by their menfolk. And throughout this period, the same reasoning, enshrined in ancient custom, prevented women, even of the highest social class, from voting in parliamentary elections.<sup>22</sup>

Men who put themselves forward for election to the House of Commons had, after legislation in 1710, to meet precise property qualifications. A successful candidate for a county seat had swear, upon his admission into the House, that he owned lands worth at least £600 per annum or, for a borough seat, at least £300 per annum.<sup>23</sup> This rule prevented poor men as well as many from 'middling' backgrounds from standing, although the ingenious could find ways of circumventing the restriction.<sup>24</sup> Only in 1838 was the qualification converted into a general income qualification;<sup>25</sup> and in 1858 it was abolished entirely, after opposition from, among others, the working-class Chartists.<sup>26</sup>

All minors or 'infants' under the age of 21, of whatever wealth or status, were further precluded from voting; and, in theory, from becoming MPs. Nonetheless, despite the formal prohibition, some youngsters from powerful families were upon occasion elected to the Commons. One such was Charles James Fox, elected at the age of 19 for Midhurst in Sussex. He and others like him were not supposed to speak or vote in the Commons, being regarded as undergoing an unofficial form of political apprenticeship.<sup>27</sup>

There were other restrictions, depending both upon law and individual decisions within the framework of the law. Under the 1701 Act of Settlement, no 'alien', defined as an individual born outside the country's boundaries, was entitled to become an MP.<sup>28</sup> But such outsiders upon occasion did manage to vote, if they were unchallenged at the polls. Furthermore, the 1749 case of the pipe-smoking and foreign-accented John Harris of Wardour Street in Westminster was an example of an individual, believed by his neighbours to be a Dutchman, who

voted successfully and survived a challenge.<sup>29</sup>

All electors might be asked to swear to their identity and their qualification(s) for voting. Indeed, it was within the discretion of the returning officer to administer additional oaths, requiring the elector to swear the oath of allegiance. In practice, voters who belonged to an array of religious denominations managed to vote; but matters were more formalised in the case of gaining election as an MP. All those who were unwilling to swear allegiance on the 'full oath of a Christian' were debarred, although a number of Protestant nonconformists were willing to take the oath. But excluded were practising Catholics (before the law was changed in 1829), Quakers (before 1833), Jews (before 1858), and all non-Christians, as well as atheists (before 1886).<sup>30</sup>

It may be noted that clergymen were entitled to vote (although many did not) but were deemed ineligible to stand for the lower House. In 1790 and 1796, that customary rule was challenged *de facto* by the radical candidate John Horne Tooke, who had been ordained as a young man. In fact, his two campaigns in the Westminster constituency were unsuccessful, but in 1801 he was returned for the pocket borough of Old Sarum. Displeased, the government immediately passed legislation to give the exclusion of all clergymen (of the established Churches of England and Scotland) statutory force.<sup>31</sup> Horne Tooke was allowed to keep his seat, as a special exception, but only until the subsequent dissolution of Parliament in 1802.<sup>32</sup>

In this way, a set of case laws and constitutional enactments continuously refined the qualifications for MPs. Ultimately, however, the test was an electorate that was willing to stand by a disputed candidate, and return him again and again, even against a ruling from Parliament. Such cases have happened rarely;<sup>33</sup> but this period did witness the pioneering precedent set by John Wilkes, whose prolonged and ultimately successful struggle to take his seat as the successively re-elected MP for Middlesex is fully documented in the LED.<sup>34</sup>

Not only were there complex rules to determine who could take his seat as an MP, but the rules and conventions about voting under the pre-Reform constitution were even more famously diverse. The issue is sufficiently important to be dealt with in greater detail in section 2.1.5: the metropolitan electorates. At this point, however, it is helpful to review briefly the criteria across the different constituencies whose voters appear within the LED.

Before 1832, the right of voting in Middlesex belonged with adult

males who owned land in the county worth forty shillings per annum. In London, meanwhile, it lay in those freemen who were liverymen of a livery company, meeting in Common Hall.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, in Westminster, the male householders who paid their parish rates had the right to vote in parliamentary elections. If they met these requirements, all adult males of sound mind were qualified. Hence, as one election commentator summarised the situation slyly in 1789, the right to vote was ‘the much admired and envied liberty of an Englishman. Women, infants, idiots and madmen are absolutely disqualified from the exercise of the privilege’.<sup>36</sup>

After the first Reform Act in 1832, the old variations in the franchise were removed. The right of voting was deemed instead to lie with those men whose names were correctly entered on the newly instituted annual registers of electors.<sup>37</sup>

Rules about the mechanisms of voting also had a significant impact upon the electoral process. Throughout this period, these rules were in stark contrast to twenty-first-century experiences. The first and most important of these rules was that voting was open. When a man polled, a poll clerk wrote down the name of the voter and for whom he polled. Such a public affirmation indicated that the voter stood by his choice in an open and ‘manly’ way, and reflected a conception of voting as the exercise of a civic trust.<sup>38</sup> Secondly most parliamentary constituencies returned more than one member, and voters had at their disposal as many votes as there were seats being contested. In general elections in London, four seats were contested, so voters had four votes at their disposal. But in Middlesex and Westminster, as in most other English constituencies, two seats were contested at general elections and each elector had two votes at his disposal.

Lastly, the concept of the uniform ‘election day’ was unknown before the twentieth century. In earlier times, different constituencies held their elections on different days, and elections in large constituencies generally took place over a number of days.<sup>39</sup> Combined with open voting, this factor meant that voters who came late to a prolonged poll could know the relative positions of the various candidates.<sup>40</sup> That situation clearly improved the opportunities for tactical voting, although its extent remains uncertain, since voters made no comment upon the precise reasons for their choice.

### 1.9.2 Election contests: the opportunity to vote

Modern societies are accustomed to fill offices by merit. By contrast, an earlier age was accustomed to fill virtually any office from which the holder might derive benefit either by patronage or by election. Sometimes these electorates were narrow: the fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, the chapters of many cathedrals, and the magistrates of counties. But the incumbency of a remarkable number of offices was determined by the relatively broad electorates of freeholders, householders, freemen, and liverymen. The information contained in the LED is about some of these broad electorates.

At the Reform Act of 1832, the new parliamentary boroughs of Finsbury, Greenwich, Lambeth, Marylebone, and Tower Hamlets were added to the existing metropolitan constituencies of Middlesex, London, Westminster and Southwark. Those who sought reform excoriated the old political system, which had granted parliamentary representation to many provincial Sleepy Hollows while leaving new centres of population unrepresented.<sup>41</sup> But the reformers could hardly wag their fingers at the pre-reform metropolis, which stood out like a good deed in a naughty world for its active political engagement. Instead they inveighed against the increasing dissociation of the livery franchise from either trade or residence, while their wrath was reserved for those bastions of privilege, the corporation of the City of London and the livery companies that were accountable to none but their members.

The metropolis was exceptional in its politics as well as its demography and its economy.<sup>42</sup> The four pre-reform metropolitan constituencies frequently experienced parliamentary election contests long before the era of reform.<sup>43</sup> These contests were generally triggered by elite rivalry, rather than pressure from the electorate, since a contest could only occur when more candidates offered themselves than there were seats available to be filled.<sup>44</sup> But upon occasion, as will be seen, political passions within the elite overlapped with partisan politics among the wider electorate as well. Between 1700 and 1831 there were 30 general elections. These led to contested polls on 14 occasions in Middlesex, and on 20 occasions in Westminster. In all but two of the 30 possible occasions between 1700 and 1831 the election return in London was the product of a contested poll; meanwhile the electors of Southwark polled in 23 out of the 30 possible general elections between 1700 and 1831.

But general elections were not the only opportunity that metropolitan



voters had to exercise choice in the selection of representatives in parliament. By-elections were fairly frequent, although they were less frequently contested. Over the same period there were five contested parliamentary by-elections in Middlesex,<sup>45</sup> seven in London,<sup>46</sup> four in Westminster,<sup>47</sup> and 12 in Southwark.<sup>48</sup> Between 1700 and 1831, therefore, Middlesex experienced a parliamentary election contest on average every six years. By contrast, London experienced a parliamentary election contest every three and a half years. In Westminster the average interval between election contests was five and a half years; and Southwark experienced election contests with an average interval of four years. The incidence of parliamentary election contests is shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Incidence of contested metropolitan parliamentary elections, 1700-1852**

Date	Constituency				Total
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Southwark	
1700-1726	6	12	8	10	36
1727-1752	4	4	3	5	16
1753-1778	3	5	2	4	14
1779-1804	3	8	6	7	24
1805-1831	3	6	5	9	23
1832-1852	5	10	9	5	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>142</b>

**Note:** Excludes post-1832 constituencies of Finsbury, Greenwich, Lambeth, Marylebone, and Tower Hamlets.

**Source:** For fuller information, see section 8 Metropolitan Polls.

Many adult men in the metropolis had experience of voting in parliamentary elections. Early eighteenth-century Middlesex had some 3,000 active voters, rising to 6,000 by the early nineteenth century. By contrast early eighteenth-century London had nearly 8,000 liverymen, a figure rising to 12,000 on the eve of the Reform Act, and to around 20,000 registered electors by 1847. Of these, perhaps 6,600 were active voters at the beginning of the eighteenth century, rising to 8,500 by 1826 and to 12,000 after the Reform Act. Meanwhile over 7,000 Westminster

householders were active electors in the early eighteenth century,<sup>49</sup> rising to 12,000 by the end of the century and with nearly 15,000 registered electors by 1852. Added to all that, Southwark had an electorate of about 1,500 in the early eighteenth century, rising to 3,000 in the early nineteenth century.

Metropolitan electors gained further electoral experience in other constituencies. Just as London's parliamentary franchise lacked a residential qualification, so did that of most other freeman boroughs. In these constituencies a man might gain his freedom by inheritance or by the payment of a sum of money. At every closely-fought parliamentary election in nearby freeman constituencies, metropolitan 'out-voters' would be brought by the coach-load or cart-load (depending upon their 'quality') in order to poll.<sup>50</sup> Londoners also polled in county elections. Brixton Hundred, in the north east of Surrey, was increasingly subsumed by urban sprawl during the period, and its freeholders were at least as metropolitan as those of rural Middlesex.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, some freeholders from counties throughout the country might be London liverymen, while others were part-time Londoners, the seasonal metropolitan residents in the fashionable streets and squares of Westminster and Marylebone.

Added to all this activity in parliamentary elections, the metropolitan electors enjoyed yet more opportunities to cast a vote for the choice of their urban office-holders.<sup>52</sup> The incumbency of virtually every elected place or office could be determined by a poll. Whilst always subject to the powerful claims of seniority and incumbency, London liverymen in Common Hall polled from time to time in for their sheriffs,<sup>53</sup> lord mayors,<sup>54</sup> chamberlains,<sup>55</sup> wardens of London Bridge (bridge masters),<sup>56</sup> auditors,<sup>57</sup> and inspectors of ale and beer (aleconners). From as early as 1194 onwards, county coroners were elected by freeholders of each county. Indeed, the freeholders of Middlesex polled for their coroners in at least 11 known contests in the years 1700 and 1832, and it is likely that other contests went unreported, especially in the early eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Turnouts on these occasions could be impressive. Thus 4,973 freeholders polled in the election of 1816 at which Thomas Stirling was elected coroner, and 7,204 polled in 1831 when William Baker was elected.<sup>59</sup> The freeholders' right to elect their county coroners survived until 1888,<sup>60</sup> although some metropolitan coroners had always been appointed.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, other contexts also provided scope for electoral experience. Members of the East India Company and other chartered companies

polled for their directors. The Governors of London's Foundling Hospital (launched 1739) voted for the members of the Hospital's General Committee, which then voted for various Hospital doctors and other officials.<sup>62</sup> And in some metropolitan parishes, the parishioners polled for their churchwardens, lecturers, organists,<sup>63</sup> and sextons.

In the City of London, all householders who were freemen were entitled to poll at wardmotes (ward meetings), in elections for their aldermen and common councilmen. Also participant in these elections were the London liverymen, who were freemen by virtue of their liveries. In the eighteenth century, many of these liverymen lived in or close to the City, although Common Hall had no formal residential requirement. Numerous election results from such wardmote contests are listed in section 8. Indeed, the frequency of elections meant that eighteenth-century newspapers were replete with advertisements from candidates canvassing for the 'vote and interest' of potential voters.

At the same time, there was an even wider householder electorate, termed here the quasi-wardmote, who voted for a range of minor civic posts, such as the ward beadle.<sup>64</sup> This wider but loosely defined group included, in addition to the liverymen and the residential freemen householders, a number of non-free rate-paying householders (such as business partners) and even, on occasions, some women householders who were rate-payers in their own right.<sup>65</sup>

Encouraged by the range of posts in contention, the frequency of contested elections in Common Hall is striking (see Table 2). In addition to 35 parliamentary elections between 1700 and 1831, the liverymen experienced contested elections on nine occasions when the office of chamberlain fell vacant, and on five occasions when the incumbent chamberlain was unsuccessfully challenged. The office of sheriff was the subject of a poll on at least 30 occasions in the same period, whilst the liverymen polled for their lord mayor on at least 21 occasions. The occupation of the less important office of bridge master was frequently determined by a poll, with at least 23 contests between 1700 and 1831.

It is difficult to estimate the number of liverymen who polled in a contested election. Parliamentary general elections returned four candidates, while in elections for sheriffs and in the popular elections for lord mayor two candidates were returned. The possibilities of plumping (polling for one candidate only) and of split voting (polling for candidates from different slates) means that it is difficult to estimate the numbers polling from a published tally of the total of votes given to each candidate.

The minutes of Common Hall do not always record the number of votes gained by each candidate.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, newspaper advertisements are unreliable sources: those exhortations issued in daily newspapers during the course of a poll frequently ceased on the morning of the final day of polling. Moreover, reports issued after the close of the poll generally recorded the names of the successful candidates, but did not always record the final tally of votes.

**Table 2**  
**Incidence of contested elections in Common Hall, 1700-1831**

Date	Chamberlain	Sheriffs	Lord Mayor	Bridge Master	Total
1700-1726	3	12	4	2	21
1727-1752	3	4	1	5	13
1753-1778	5	9	7	5	26
1779-1804	2	1	3	7	13
1805-1831	1	4	6	4	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>88</b>

**Source:** For fuller information, see section 8 Metropolitan Polls.

Temporal variation in the incidence of parliamentary election contests, together with those in Common Hall, allows no simple linear narrative of the rise of parliamentary or local democracy.<sup>67</sup> Heightened political tensions in the later seventeenth century led to an increase in the number of contests being settled by a poll.<sup>68</sup> The ‘first age of party’ in the reign of Anne stands out as a time of particularly frequent election contests, the more so given the paucity of data from these years.

There followed a rather quieter period around the middle of the eighteenth century, although the popular voice was far from extinguished during these years. In the 12 years between 1768, when John Wilkes first stood as a candidate in a London parliamentary election, and 1779 when he was elected chamberlain, liverymen polled in at least 21 contested elections. A further lull ensued during the years of the French wars.

Nonetheless, overall London’s liverymen polled in contested elections on average roughly once a year between 1700 and 1831. In consequence, the liverymen of London constituted the most experienced parliamentary electorate in the country.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 3**  
**General election returns in metropolitan constituencies, 1700-1852**

Date of Election	Constituency			
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Southwark
January 1701	X	LED	X	X
December 1701	X	X	X	X
1702	X	X	X	X
1705	LED	X	X	~
1708	~	X	X	~
1710	LED	LED	X	X
1713	~	LED	~	X
1715	LED	X	~	~
1722	X	LED	X	X
1727	LED	LED	~	~
1734	~	X	~	X
1741	~	X	X	X
1747	LED	X	X	X
1754	~	X	X	X
1761	~	X	~	X
1768	LED	LED	~	X
1774	~	X	LED	X
1780	~	X	LED	X
1784	LED	LED	LED	~
1790	~	X	LED	~
1796	~	LED	LED	X
1802	LED	X	LED	X
1806	X	X	LED	X
1807	X	X	X	X
1812	~	X	~	X
1818	~	X	LED	X
1820	LED	X	LED	X
1826	~	X	~	X
1830	~	~	~	X
1831	~	~	~	~
1832	X	X	X	X
1835	X	X	X	~
1837	X	LED	LED	X
1841	~	X	LED	~
1847	X	LED	X	~
1852	X	X	LED	X

**Key:**

- ~ Uncontested election
- X Contested; no extant individual-level data
- LED Contested; individual-level data in the LED.

**Sources:** *Hist. Parl., 1690-1715; Hist. Parl., 1715-54; Hist. Parl., 1754-90; Hist. Parl., 1790-1820; Hist. Parl., 1820-32; Stooks Smith; Craig.*

In London, furthermore, sheriffs, lord mayors, and auditors were elected annually by Common Hall, although these elections did not always go to a poll. To have served as sheriff being a prerequisite for election as lord mayor, elections for sheriffs were occasionally contested whilst mayoral elections were before 1739 frequently settled by seniority. Participation was widespread at contested Common Hall elections and it was not uncommon for 4,000 or more liverymen to poll. In the closely fought election for sheriffs in 1723, from which no individual-level data survive, nearly 13,000 votes were distributed virtually equally between the four candidates, while over 6,000 liverymen polled in each of the fiercely contested elections for the city chamberlain in 1718, 1728 and again in 1734.<sup>70</sup>

Whilst elections for chamberlain were less frequent than for sheriff, they too were held on the Common Hall franchise of liverymen. Between 1700 and 1831 the chamberlain's office fell vacant by death or resignation on 10 occasions, and on each occasion the vacancy was filled by a contested election, at which liverymen polled over 40,000 times.<sup>71</sup> Whilst it was conventional not to challenge an incumbent chamberlain, John Wilkes stood against the incumbent Benjamin Hopkins in 1776, 1777, and 1778, causing liverymen to poll over 9,000 times.<sup>72</sup> Polls survive from seven of these non-parliamentary elections in Common Hall between 1700 and 1831, and a further one between 1832 and 1852.

### **1.9.3 Polling: the act of open voting**

To measure popular participation it would be simplest to know how many voters, out of the total number of potential electors, actually polled in parliamentary elections. Yet such information is not readily available for the period before 1832. Hence as Sancho Panza remarked to his master, 'we must learn to itch where we can scratch'.

One measure of participation is to count the total of all votes cast in these elections, to appreciate the sheer scale of election activity. Such

candidates' totals are readily available in contemporary newspapers, and are usefully summarised in the *History of Parliament* and Stooks Smith. Viewed in aggregate, the freeholders of Middlesex cast nearly 100,000 votes in the parliamentary elections between 1700 and 1831; London's liverymen cast over 600,000 votes; the householders of Westminster cast over 250,000 votes; and the householders of Southwark over 100,000 votes. As each elector in Middlesex, Westminster, and Southwark had two votes at his disposal in general elections, this information suggests that Middlesex freeholders polled over 60,000 times, that Westminster's householders polled nearly 180,000 times, and that the electors of Southwark polled about 70,000 times. Each London liveryman having four votes at his disposal in general elections suggests that the liverymen polled on 200,000 occasions or more.

In all, electors polled over 500,000 times in metropolitan parliamentary contests between 1700 and 1831.

Relating the aggregate of votes to individuals is difficult, as the same man might poll in more than one contest and in more than one constituency. The historian J.C.D. Clark has argued that many eighteenth-century elections were characterised by 'high turnover and low turnouts at the polls'.<sup>73</sup> Not all agree with his assessment of the state of eighteenth-century politics; but his remark in itself has some interesting implications. If the number of electors who polled on more than one occasion was small, then the greater was the proportion of adult men across the country who had some experience of voting. Alternatively, the greater the proportion of those who polled on more than one occasion, the greater the cumulative experience of these individuals.

In fact, the measured incidence of repeated voting is in part a product of the way in which voters may be linked between one election and the next.<sup>74</sup> The most likely situation is that there was some turnover of electoral cohorts, some abstention, some polling in more than one election, and some polling in more than one constituency.

The application of crude multipliers shows something of the scale. If it is assumed that two-thirds of all voters in each of the less frequently contested Middlesex elections were newcomers with no previous electoral experience, then the resulting calculation suggests that during the period 1700-1831 over 40,000 Middlesex freeholders polled in one or more parliamentary elections in that constituency. Westminster was even more frequently contested than Middlesex. If it is assumed that half of all its voters had no previous experience of polling in parliamentary

elections, then a similar calculation suggests that 90,000 Westminster householders polled in one or more elections in the period. London and Southwark were still more frequently contested. On the assumption that just a third of their voters at each election were newcomers, then nearly 70,000 London liverymen and over 23,000 Southwark householders polled between 1700 and 1831.

Together, therefore, nearly 250,000 metropolitan voters polled over 500,000 times in these parliamentary elections. In addition, the London liverymen polled over a 250,000 times in Common Hall in the same period. And these totals are still underestimates, as there were several civic election contests for which no polling figures survive. (Those contests for which aggregate records survive are all listed in the Metropolitan Polls in section 8.)

Adding in elections in other parliamentary constituencies, together with those for other offices in the county, wardmote, and parish in which liverymen, freemen, and householders participated, it can be estimated that a 300,000 people from the metropolis polled over 1,000,000 times over the period 1700 to 1831.

Across the metropolitan area as a whole, there was a mean frequency of about 6,000 voting acts a year in parliamentary elections and Common Hall combined. Mean frequencies, of course, may conceal as much as they reveal. The frequency was particularly high during the early years of the eighteenth century. But the ending of triennial parliaments reduced the frequency of opportunity to participate in general elections.<sup>75</sup> The Wilkes years in the early 1770s then stand out as being a second high point in electoral activity. At the same time, the pool of eligible electors then began to grow steadily from the later years of the eighteenth century to the Reform Act period.

Clearly, the 1832 Reform Act did make a difference. The most important reason for this was the enfranchisement of new constituencies. In the five new metropolitan parliamentary constituencies of Finsbury, Greenwich, Lambeth, Marylebone, and Tower Hamlets voters polled over 180,000 times in the twenty years after 1832. A second reason was the increased incidence of contested parliamentary elections. In the nine metropolitan constituencies as a whole at the six general elections in the period, only eight returns were made without a contest. Not one general election return in Greenwich, Lambeth, London, or Westminster was made without a poll. The third reason was the increase in the electorate in existing constituencies. Here the experience was more diverse.



London's liverymen and the householders 'paying scot and bearing lot' (local taxes) of Southwark and Westminster retained their right to vote, subject to certain conditions.<sup>76</sup> The twin processes of mortality and mobility made these a shrinking pool of electors, increasingly outnumbered by the new £10 householders enfranchised by the Reform Act. Nonetheless the Reform Act built on the foundations of a numerous body of electors possessed of extensive electoral experience.

At any time, there was pool of thousands of Londoners with experience of polling in elections. (See Tables 4 and 5 for reported and estimated voter totals). And while this experience was clearly not an everyday occurrence, it was nonetheless a known, if irregular, event that may well have happened a number of times within an individual's career. Regular participation, which happened throughout the country in response to the registration requirement in the Reform Act of 1832,<sup>77</sup> was in fact a notable feature of London politics well over a century earlier. On the face of it, these are not the characteristics of an unengaged, unconcerned, indifferent, and apathetic electorate. Indeed, in the metropolis, the complaints tended to imply quite the reverse: that election fevers ran too high.<sup>78</sup>

In fairness to Clark's case for voter apathy, voting for public office was disproportionately a metropolitan phenomenon. In 1774 nearly 16,000 polled in the metropolitan constituencies of London, Westminster, and Southwark, representing about one in six of the 94,000 who voted in Great Britain as a whole.<sup>79</sup> In the general election of 1784 just seven of the 40 English counties settled their choice of representative by a poll, whilst only 63 of the 203 boroughs did so.

By contrast, in the metropolitan region, the elections that year were settled by a poll in Middlesex, in London, and in Westminster. Only in Southwark was the election uncontested. Indeed, over a third of the votes cast in English constituencies at the general election of 1784 were cast in the metropolitan region, and probably nearly one fifth of those who exercised their right of voting in that election did so in a metropolitan constituency.<sup>80</sup>

The general election of 1784 was, however, quiet in the country as a whole, and the choice of a different period suggests a lower proportion of total electoral activity coming from the metropolis.

**Table 4**  
**Votes cast at selected metropolitan general elections, 1700-1852**

Date of Election	Constituency			
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Southwark
December 1701	3,907	22,034	9,405	6,605
1702	4,575	15,776	9,282	664
1705	5,972	23,076	11,101	4,843
1708		20,287	9,526	
1710	6,344	22,534	12,101	
1713		26,387	11,074	2,766
1715	5,812	29,933		2,993
1722	4,565	25,249		
1727	4,828	23,017	12,289	3,297
1734		26,580		
1741		17,941		2,963
1747	4,947	17,651	13,670	2,156
1754		18,257	6,789	2,767
1761		18,736	7,039	1,917
1768	2,926	18,430		2,539
1774		19,605		3,401
1780		19,409	14,771	3,419
1784	5,768	18,780	14,333	3,293
1790		19,790	18,906	
1796		19,514	8,430	
1802	9,991	20,879	12,793	3,933
1806	7,214	14,125	6,795	4,265
1807	6,326	9,514	14,717	4,694
1812		11,848	13,893	5,610
1818		22,432		4,526
1820	10,682	25,456	15,557	4,399
1826		27,935		2,877
1830		26,626		4,861
1831				4,093
1832	8,769	35,169	7,558	5,012
1835	9,308	38,056	6,863	
1837	18,031	30,410	10,128	4,717
1841		49,529	9,877	
1847	12,577	49,954	10,774	
1852	13,889	25,515	13,044	10,737

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1690-1715; Hist. Parl., 1715-54; Hist. Parl., 1754-90; Hist. Parl., 1790-1820; Hist. Parl., 1820-32; Stooks Smith; Craig.*

**Table 5**  
**Estimated polls at metropolitan general elections, 1700-1852**

	Constituency				Total
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Southwark	
January 1701		5,539	4,800	4,000	14,339
December 1701	2,000	4,400	4,700	350	11,450
1702	2,400	6,000	5,800	3,000	17,200
1705	3,012	5,600	6,000		14,612
1708		6,500	7,237		13,737
1710	3,213	6,647	6,100	1,500	17,460
1713		7,579		1,600	9,179
1715	3,000	6,500			9,500
1722	2,600	7,136	6,250	1,900	17,886
1727	2,491	6,762			9,253
1734		5,500		1,900	7,400
1741		5,000	7,000	1,150	13,150
1747	2,539	5,600	3,450	1,700	13,289
1754		5,931	3,650	1,200	10,781
1761		6,000		1,600	7,600
1768	1,986	5,700		2,000	9,686
1774		6,300	7,514	2,000	15,814
1780		6,300	9,134	2,000	17,434
1784	3,635	6,000	12,301	1,919	23,855
1790		6,000	6,500		12,500
1796		6,322	9,000	2,329	17,651
1802	6,295	4,200	4,682	2,400	17,577
1806	4,200	4,500	10,000	2,500	21,200
1807	3,800	4,000	8,622	3,000	19,422
1812		7,500		2,740	10,240
1818		7,978	10,138	2,475	20,591
1820	6,300	8,500	9,280	1,640	25,720
1826		8,639		2,958	11,597
1830				2,635	2,635
1831					
1832	5,132	11,500	4,453	2,810	23,895
1835	6,046	11,456	4,254		21,756
1837	9,260	11,932	6,350	2,898	30,440
1841		12,000	6,596		18,596
1847	8,000	12,000	6,000		26,000
1852	9,000	10,000	8,549	6,000	33,549
<b>Total</b>	<b>84,909</b>	<b>241,521</b>	<b>178,360</b>	<b>62,204</b>	<b>566,994</b>

**Note:** Excludes post-1832 constituencies of Finsbury, Greenwich, Lambeth, Marylebone, and Tower Hamlets.

**Source:** For fuller information, see section 8 Metropolitan Polls.

Surveying the eighteenth century as a whole, E.A. Wrigley estimated that around one English person in six lived for some time in the metropolis.<sup>81</sup> It may be calculated too that the proportion of England's active voters from the metropolitan region did not fall far short of that proportion. In the general election of 1832, when over 482,000 voters polled in the United Kingdom as a whole, over 50,000 did so in the metropolitan constituencies of Middlesex, London, Westminster, Marylebone, Finsbury, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, Southwark, and Lambeth.<sup>82</sup> Fewer constituencies were contested at the general election of 1835, and the numbers polling were lower at 342,670. Nonetheless about 42,000 electors polled in these metropolitan constituencies, or almost one voting act in eight across the United Kingdom as a whole.<sup>83</sup>

One of the criticisms made of poll book studies is their tendency to concentrate on the smaller boroughs. Smaller boroughs may have constituted a majority of constituencies, but the majority of electors by the middle of the nineteenth century lived in the large boroughs.<sup>84</sup> Few poll books survive from these larger boroughs in the post-reform period. The data in the LED redresses the balance by focusing upon the great metropolis and its politically active electors. Tables 6 and 7 summarise the scale of electoral participation (by aggregated time-periods) in metropolitan parliamentary elections between 1700 and 1852; and in Common Hall elections between 1700 and 1831.

**Table 6**  
**Estimated polls in aggregated time-periods at elections in metropolitan parliamentary constituencies, 1700-1852**

Date	Constituency				Total
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Southwark	
1700-1726	16,200	72,600	48,200	18,500	155,500
1727-1752	8,400	22,900	19,900	7,800	59,000
1753-1778	6,300	29,100	11,200	6,700	53,300
1779-1804	15,600	40,900	53,600	15,700	125,800
1805-1831	14,300	41,100	46,400	21,700	123,500
1832-1852	37,400	106,800	54,200	18,800	217,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>98,200</b>	<b>313,400</b>	<b>233,500</b>	<b>89,200</b>	<b>734,300</b>

**Note:** Excludes post-1832 constituencies of Finsbury, Greenwich, Lambeth, Marylebone, and Tower Hamlets.

**Source:** For fuller information, see section 8 Metropolitan Polls.

**Table 7**  
**Estimated polls at elections in Common Hall, 1700-1831**

	Sheriffs	Lord Mayor	Chamberlain	Bridge Master	Total
1700-1726	47,500	17,600	9,300	1,800	76,200
1727-1752	6,600	100	16,300	18,700	41,700
1753-1778	16,600	21,600	18,200	15,000	71,400
1779-1804	2,100	5,200	3,300	24,400	35,000
1805-1831	6,200	23,300	5,500	13,400	48,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>79,000</b>	<b>67,800</b>	<b>52,600</b>	<b>73,300</b>	<b>272,700</b>

**Note:** The figures for sheriffs and bridge master are almost certainly underestimates, particularly for the period 1700-26.

**Source:** For fuller information, see section 8 Metropolitan Polls.

### 1.9.4 Individual-level records

Whilst many metropolitan elections were contested, the survival of individual-level data of electoral behaviour is patchy. The LED contains some 365,000 electoral records from 56 electoral contests between 1700 and 1852. This total figure includes some double counting for those records that appear in both linked and unlinked data sets, and it includes individual-level data on non-voters where this information is included in the source. Table 8 gives a summary of the different types of election.

**Table 8**  
**Poll book records in the LED by constituency and type**

Election type	Parliamentary constituency				Common Hall	Total
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Marylebone		
General	28,810	89,220	91,788	23,140		232,958
By	9,787	16,738	24,245	11,570		61,980
Other					48,093	48,093
Linked	3,476			11,570	6,883	21,929
<b>Total</b>						

**Note:** Figures include unpolled electors.

**Source:** LED.

For the period 1700-1852, LED contains individual-level data from Middlesex for nine general elections and three parliamentary by-elections, together with linked data from three parliamentary elections. For London there are data from 11 general elections, three by-elections, and seven London-wide non-parliamentary elections. In addition, there are linked data from three of these non-parliamentary elections. For Marylebone there are data from two general elections and one by-election, together with linked data from these three parliamentary elections. Furthermore, from Westminster there are data from 12 general elections and three by-elections. In total, then, there are data from 34 general election contests, 10 by-elections, and seven non-parliamentary elections. Altogether LED contains about 365,000 individual-level poll book records.

The distribution of surviving data is uneven, and the contingency of data survival has imperfectly related to historians' interests in particular

elections. Nothing worthwhile survives for Southwark from the entire period. That is the greatest single lacuna in the detailed records. Hence, although the Southwark polling totals<sup>85</sup> are used for the metropolitan overview in Tables 4-6 (above), the LED does not contain any further breakdown of Southwark voting patterns at individual level. Other gaps in the parliamentary record must be noted too. Nothing survives from Westminster from the first half of the eighteenth century, and virtually nothing from Middlesex from the first half of the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, poll book records survive for almost a third out of the three-quarters of a million voting acts in metropolitan constituencies between 1700 and 1832, and for nearly half of the 500,000 or so voting acts at parliamentary elections. These records survive in profusion from the City of London between 1710 and 1734, and from Westminster between 1774 and 1820. Moreover, the LED contains poll data from the election for sheriff of 1724, the election for chamberlain of 1734, and the elections for lord mayor from 1772, 1831 and 1840. The constituency of Marylebone had no existence before 1832, but individual-level data survive from three election contests between 1837 and 1841.

Overall, the LED thus incorporates rich fare (as summarised in Tables 9-11) that invites further analysis, whether at individual, street, ward, or constituency level.

**Table 9**  
**Number of LED general election voting records, 1700-1852**

Date of Election	Constituency			
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Marylebone
January 1701		<b>7,798</b>		
December 1701				
1702				
1705	3,012			
1708				
1710	3,213	<b>8,292</b>		
1713		7,579		
1715	3,278			
1722		7,136		
1727	2,491	<b>8,553</b>		
1734				
1741				
1747	2,539			
1754				

Date of Election	Constituency			
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Marylebone
1761				
1768	<b>3,476</b>	<i>5,700</i>		
1774			7,514	
1780			9,134	
1784	3,635	5,007	12,237	
1790			<i>5,015</i>	
1796		6,322	<i>3,058</i>	
1802	6,295		4,682	
1806			<i>4,611</i>	
1807				
1812				
1818			10,138	
1820	<i>871</i>			
1826				
1830				
1831				
1832				
1835				
1837		11,564	6,327	<i>4,480</i>
1841				<b>11,570</b>
1847		<b>21,269</b>	6,603	
1852			<b>14,883</b>	

**Note:** Figures in *italic* indicate incomplete data. Figures in **bold** include unpolled electors.

**Source:** LED.



**Table 10**  
**Poll book records in the LED, 1700-1852**

Date	Parliamentary constituency				Common Hall	Total
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Marylebone		
1700-1726	9,503	33,062			6,612	49,177
1727-1752	7,848	6,762	9,463		6,606	30,679
1753-1778	6,222	10,855	7,514		4,558	29,149
1779-1804	9,930	16,391	42,352			68,673
1805-1831	871		28,891		12,292	42,054
1832-1852		22,945	21,478	18,095	5,082	67,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,374</b>	<b>67,070</b>	<b>109,698</b>	<b>18,095</b>	<b>35,150</b>	<b>264,387</b>

**Note:** Totals exclude unpolled electors.

**Source:** LED, excluding duplicated poll book returns.

**Table 11**  
**Poll book records in the LED, 1700-1852, as percentage of estimated poll**

Date	Parliamentary constituency				Common Hall
	Middlesex	London	Westminster	Marylebone	
1700-1726	59	46	0		10
1727-1752	93	29	20		16
1753-1778	99	37	67		6
1779-1804	64	40	79		0
1805-1831	6	0	62		26
1832-1852	0	21	40	36	

**Source:** LED, excluding duplicated poll book returns.

One of the enduring strengths of the pre-reform electoral system was its diversity.<sup>86</sup> Although its variety may seem perverse and baffling to the twenty-first-century eye, it ensured the representation of a wide variety of interests in parliament.<sup>87</sup> Even the reformers' great complaint about metropolitan under-representation was specious in one sense, since many MPs were at least part-time Londoners themselves. Such was the variety of the pre-reform system that no one constituency can be termed 'typical'. In this context, the scale and sustained vigour of the metropolitan electoral participation was exceptional – and important precisely for that reason.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Among a lively literature, see J. White, *London in the eighteenth century: a great and monstrous thing* (2012); R. Shoemaker, *The London mob: violence and disorder in eighteenth-century England* (2004); T. Hitchcock, *Down and out in eighteenth-century London* (2004); M.D. George, *London life in the eighteenth century* (1930; 1966); G. Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714-1808* (1971); M. Byrd, *London transformed: images of the city in the eighteenth century* (New Haven, Ct, 1978); D. Arnold (ed.), *The metropolis and its image: constructing identities for London, 1750-1950* (Oxford, 1999); and, for further references, P.L. Garside (ed.), *Capital histories: a bibliographical study of London* (1998).
- <sup>2</sup> The best introduction to the unreformed electoral system is F. O'Gorman, *Voters, patrons, and parties: the unreformed electoral system of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989), although, perhaps unavoidably, it pays more attention to the small constituencies than it does to the large metropolitan ones. For long term context, see also J. Lawrence, *Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009).
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Dickens, *The posthumous papers of the Pickwick club* (1836-7), commonly termed *The Pickwick papers*, chapter 13.
- <sup>4</sup> See also P.J. Corfield, 'Short Summary, section 1.10.
- <sup>5</sup> Individual-level data are information about identifiable people. Identifiers may be anonymised (either through partial information or from policy), for example when social security numbers replace names. In the LED, all are named personally in the form that they were publicly identified in the relevant records.

- <sup>6</sup> It greatly extends the material originally published by C. Harvey, E.M. Green and P.J. Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database: voters, social structure and electoral behaviour* (Bristol, 1998).
- <sup>7</sup> The greatest gap is that of the 23 parliamentary electoral contests that are known to have taken place in the borough of Southwark between 1700 and 1832, and there are also lacunae for many local elections, which are known only by the voting totals.
- <sup>8</sup> See section 8 Metropolitan Polls 8.1.1-9.
- <sup>9</sup> See section 8 Metropolitan Polls 8.2.1-5.
- <sup>10</sup> See section 8 Metropolitan Polls 8.3.1-26.
- <sup>11</sup> See section 8 Metropolitan Polls 8.4.
- <sup>12</sup> For record linkage with reference to returning voters in a sequence of Westminster elections, see P.J. Corfield, E.M. Green and C. Harvey, 'Westminster man: Charles James Fox and his electorate, 1780-1806', *Parliamentary History*, 20 (2001), pp. 157-85.
- <sup>13</sup> It may be further noted that, in a few cases, a substantial individual might qualify for the vote in more than one constituency, by dint of qualifying under each local franchise. An elector was then entitled to vote in each constituency for which he was qualified. The extent to which such electoral pluralism did or did not occur can be tested by record linkage within the LED.
- <sup>14</sup> The United Kingdom's Data Protection Act (1998) applies to data that can be used to identify a living person. It places restrictions on organisations holding data about living subjects, including the requirement that data may only be used for the purpose for which they were collected.
- <sup>15</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the definition of culture* (1949), p. 90.
- <sup>16</sup> T.B. Macaulay, *Speeches: parliamentary and miscellaneous* (1858), i, p. 42: speech on parliamentary reform, 20 September 1831.
- <sup>17</sup> D.C. North, *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> For the power of customary law, *lex loci*, and the contests to which it could give rise, see Thompson, *Customs in common*, pp. 4-7, 97-184.

- <sup>19</sup> Defended in Anon., *The case of the late election for the county of Middlesex, considered on the principles of the constitution, and the authorities of law* (1769). This pamphlet has been variously attributed to William Blackstone and to Jeremiah Dyson.
- <sup>20</sup> 2 George II, c. 24 (1729).
- <sup>21</sup> Constance Markiewicz (1869-1927), returned for Dublin St Patrick's in 1918, was the first woman to be returned to the House of Commons. Nancy Astor (1879-1964), MP for Plymouth Sutton, November 1919-45, was the first to take her seat. Women aged 21 and over became entitled to become MPs under the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, 8 & 9 George V c. 47 (1918), but women remained excluded from the House of Lords until female life peers were admitted under the Life Peerage Act, 6 & 7 Elizabeth II, c. 21 (1958) and female peers with hereditary titles in their own right were admitted under the Peerage Act (1963, c. 48).
- <sup>22</sup> For the political influence of women, see A. Vickery (ed.), *Women, privilege and power: British politics, 1750 to the present* (Palo Alto, Ca, 2001); K. Gleadle and S. Richardson (eds), *Women in British politics, 1760-1860: the power of the petticoat* (2000); and E. Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c.1754-90* (Oxford, 2005). Some women property-owners managed in this period to exercise electoral influence, for example by getting men to vote as their (unofficial) proxies. Formal enfranchisement was first debated in the Commons in May 1867, at the instigation of John Stuart Mill; and after 1869 women rate-payers were admitted to the franchise in urban elections, under the Municipal Corporations Elections Act, 32 & 33 Victoria, c. 55 (1869). After numerous failed bills, women aged 30 years and over were allowed to vote in parliamentary elections, under the Representation of the People Act 7 & 8 George V, c. 64 (1918). The franchise was later extended to all women aged over 21 under the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, 18 & 19 George V, c. 12 (1928). That legislation ended the anomaly that all women aged over 21 were entitled to become MPs (under the 1918 legislation) a decade before young women under 30 ('flappers') were entitled to vote in parliamentary elections.
- <sup>23</sup> The property qualification was imposed by 9 Anne, c. 5 (1710); and, fifty years later, 33 George II, c. 20 (1760) attempted to tighten procedures, to prevent evasion of the rules. See E. Porritt and A. Porritt, *The unreformed House of Commons* (Cambridge, 1903), i, pp. 166-81.
- <sup>24</sup> P.J. Corfield, *Power and the professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (1995), p. 10.
- <sup>25</sup> 1 and 2 Victoria, c. 48 (1838).

- <sup>26</sup> See W.L. Burn, 'Property qualifications in the House of Commons', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2 (1949), pp. 274-83. From 1918 onwards, candidates were required to provide a deposit upon putting their name forward for election, a requirement that still applies.
- <sup>27</sup> See Porritt and Porritt, *Unreformed House of Commons*, i, pp. 223-36. For the age of majority, see K.V. Thomas, *Age and authority in early modern England* (1976), reprinted in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1977), pp. 205-48.
- <sup>28</sup> The Act of Settlement of 1701 (12 & 13 William III, c. 2) prohibited aliens born outside the monarch's dominions from sitting in the Commons, including those who had subsequently become naturalised. This latter barrier was removed by 33 & 34 Victoria, c. 13 (1870); but the general framework of the 1701 law was not revised until the British Nationality Act of 1981 (1981, c. 61), which declared that citizens of the UK, Britain's overseas possessions, the Republic of Ireland, and the Commonwealth were eligible to stand for the British Parliament.
- <sup>29</sup> See details in section 3.6.
- <sup>30</sup> Catholics were allowed to become MPs from 1829 under the Catholic Emancipation Act, 10 George IV c. 7 (1829); Quakers were admitted on their affirmation from 1833; Jews were admitted after swearing a modified oath from 1858. But only after Charles Bradlaugh's case in 1886 was it possible for an overt atheist to sit in the Commons (as noted below n. 33).
- <sup>31</sup> The House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act, 41 George III, c. 63 (1801) remained on the statute book until its repeal in 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> *Hist. Parl., 1790-1820*, iv, pp. 236-7.
- <sup>33</sup> In 1886, Charles Bradlaugh won the right for MPs to affirm rather than to swear on the Bible, after getting support from his Northampton electorate at five successive elections in 1880-5; and, in the mid-twentieth century, Tony Benn, who succeeded as Viscount Stansgate in 1960, won the right to renounce his title (under the new Peerage Act of 1963), with the support of his Bristol South-East constituency at two by-elections in 1961 and 1963. See also section 1.10. A much less well-known precursor of Bradlaugh was Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, elected for London in 1847, 1849 and 1857 but unable to take his seat as a Jew unwilling to swear on a Christian Bible, until allowed a revised oath in 1858: see section 5.3.
- <sup>34</sup> See details of Middlesex elections within website section 5: Middlesex & London.

- <sup>35</sup> Common Hall was ‘a meeting of the mayor, aldermen, and liverymen of the several companies of the City of London in Common Hall assembled’, *BPP* (1837), xxv, p. 75. Prior to 1738, the minutes of the assembly record its name as ‘Congregation’, although it is clear that the expression ‘Common Hall’ was used informally. For context, see D. Palfreyman, *London’s livery companies: history, law and customs* (Olney, 2010).
- <sup>36</sup> John Simeon, *Treatise on the law of elections, in all its branches* (1789), p. 50.
- <sup>37</sup> 2 William IV, c. 45, s. 27 (1832).
- <sup>38</sup> Balloting in parliamentary elections was introduced by 35 & 36 Victoria, c. 33 (1872). For context, see M. Crook and T. Crook, ‘The advent of the secret ballot in Britain and France, 1789-1914: from public assembly to private compartment’, *History*, 92 (2007), pp. 449-71.
- <sup>39</sup> The Westminster election of 1784 famously lasted for 40 days. Thereafter, by a provision of 25 George III, c. 84 (1785), polling in parliamentary elections was limited to 15 days until 1832 when the limit in English and county borough constituencies was reduced to two consecutive days. The limit in English boroughs was further reduced to a single day in 1835. Meanwhile, polling in Common Hall was limited to six days, and in wardmote elections to three days.
- <sup>40</sup> As a variation on the familiar trope of a horse race, these relative positions were caricatured by James Gillray, *Election candidates* (George, no. 10,732) at the Westminster election of 1807. Burdett and Cochrane are shown at the top of a pole erected in Covent Garden, above Elliott and Sheridan, and with the hapless Paull falling off at the bottom. For details, see section 6.2 Westminster elections.
- <sup>41</sup> Old Sarum, a Wiltshire burgh borough in which votes were attached to property, was notorious. But of Gatton, a Surrey borough in which all adult male householders had the vote, deserves to be better known. From its town hall, the returning officer would solemnly declare the names of its candidates, and perhaps call for a show of hands, before declaring the winners: for Gatton was uninhabited. At the contested by-election of January 1803 the victorious candidate received just one vote.
- <sup>42</sup> Among many studies, consult G. Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714-1808* (1971); F. Sheppard, *London, 1808-70: the infernal wen* (1971); T. Hitchcock and H. Shore (eds), *The streets of London: from the great fire to the great stink* (2003); P. Guillery, *The small house in eighteenth-century London: a social and architectural history* (2004); J. White, *London in the eighteenth century: a great and monstrous thing* (2012); idem, *London in the nineteenth century: a human awful wonder of God* (2006); and S. Foxell, *Mapping London: making sense of the city* (2007).

- <sup>43</sup> For the debated extent of participation before the first reform act, see D. Beales, 'The electorate before and after 1832: the right to vote and the opportunity', *Parliamentary History*, 11 (1992), pp. 139-50; and F. O'Gorman, 'Reply: the electorate before and after 1832', *Parliamentary History*, 12 (1993), pp. 171-83.
- <sup>44</sup> Electors elsewhere urged candidates to stand and to spend. In venal constituencies, like Sudbury (Suffolk), elections constituted a carnival in which the electors participated at the candidates' expense. Aspects of this carnivalesque mentality can sometimes be glimpsed in metropolitan elections, for example, in the uncontested Westminster-by-election of October 1806.
- <sup>45</sup> In May 1740, March 1750, December 1768, April 1769, and in July 1804.
- <sup>46</sup> In March 1701, December 1707, December 1724, December 1773, October 1781, January 1784, March 1795, February 1833, August 1833, October 1843, and in July 1849.
- <sup>47</sup> In December 1722, December 1749 (return made May 1750), August 1788, March 1819, May 1833, May 1837, and in February 1846.
- <sup>48</sup> In November 1702, January 1712, May 1714, January 1724, January 1730, June 1743, September 1782, June 1784, November 1796, June 1803, February 1815, November 1830, January 1840, and in September 1845.
- <sup>49</sup> Rogers, *Whigs and cities*, p. 169.
- <sup>50</sup> Over 1,100 London out-voters are recorded as having polled in parliamentary elections in Colchester, Essex, between 1788 and 1818. *Hist. Parl., 1790-1820*, ii, p. 158. These voters came from all parts of the metropolis, not just from the City of London. For the experience of another county, see S.M. Sommers, *Parliamentary politics of a county and its town: general elections in Suffolk and Ipswich in the eighteenth century* (Westport, Ct, 2002).
- <sup>51</sup> Most Surrey poll books are structured by place of freehold. An exception is that of the by-election of 24 March 1742, which is structured by place of residence. This shows that 22 per cent of the voters in that year were 'metropolitan' in the sense of living in Brixton hundred, in London, in Westminster, or elsewhere in Middlesex. The proportion of 'metropolitan' Surrey freeholders is likely to have increased over time: BL Add. Ms. 78,511.
- <sup>52</sup> For a claimed shift in emphasis from voting to office-holding, see Goldie, 'The unacknowledged republic', pp. 153-94.

- <sup>53</sup> The poll for sheriff in 1724 is included in the LED.
- <sup>54</sup> The polls for lord mayor in 1772, in 1831 (thrice), and in 1840 are included in the LED.
- <sup>55</sup> The poll for chamberlain in 1734 is included in the LED.
- <sup>56</sup> The office of bridge master was scarcely the most important in the City; but since the two bridge masters held substantial cash balances on account their offices were much sought-after. Those elected were frequently in straitened circumstances; and candidates' advertisements tended to stress their worthiness, having fallen on hard times through no fault of their own, in contrast to their opponent's unsuitability. Over 3,000 liverymen polled when the appointment was contested in 1734. In 1802 when three candidates stood for two offices, nearly 7,000 votes were cast, suggesting that around 3,000 liverymen polled. The poll book for the election of bridge master in 1771 has been lost for many years.
- <sup>57</sup> By a provision of 11 George I, c. 18 (1725), two auditors of the chamberlain's and bridge masters' accounts were elected each year, each for a term of two years.
- <sup>58</sup> In the eastern part of Middlesex, there were reported polls for coroners in April 1733, May 1755, February 1764, November 1786, April 1804, and September 1830, whilst in the western part of Middlesex, there were reported polls for coroners in May 1738, January 1754, July 1786, December 1786, and March 1816.
- <sup>59</sup> *BPP* (1831-2), XLIV, p. 126.
- <sup>60</sup> After 1888, coroners were appointed by county councils. For a contextual study of the coroners' courts in action, see O. Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford, 1987), p. 258. With thanks to Bob Chambers for advice on the history of the ancient office of coroner.
- <sup>61</sup> The City of London's coroners were appointed by the Corporation; and Westminster's coroners were appointed by the Dean and Chapter.
- <sup>62</sup> See Anon., *The charter, act of parliament, by-laws and regulations of the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children* (1749), pp. 53-4.
- <sup>63</sup> Lists of organists, together with indications of whether the office was filled by open election, may be found in D.A. Dawe, *Organists of the City of London, 1666-1850* (Padstow, 1983).



- <sup>64</sup> [P.E. Jones], *The corporation of London: its origin, constitution, powers and duties* (1950), pp. 9-56. See also section 3.3.2: wardmote franchise.
- <sup>65</sup> The full extent of female participation remains to be discovered. But a note in the Wardmote minute book for Farringdon Within indicates women voting in a poll for an under-beadle on 24 December 1830: see Wardmote minute book, LMA CLC/W/JA/002/ Ms. 03039 (unfoliated – see note on the relevant poll).
- <sup>66</sup> For Journals 1700-18, see LMA COL/CN/01/01/050-6; and for Minutes after 1718, see LMA COL/CN/01/01/006-10.
- <sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the extent of ‘real’ democracy remains disputed, even after the advent of formal democratic structures. For example, in 1978 the conservative peer Lord Hailsham (then out of office) complained that the UK executive had the powers of an ‘elective dictatorship’. For the continuing debates, see e.g. W. Goodhart and P. Tyler, *Britain’s democratic deficit: constitutional reform – unfinished business* (2003).
- <sup>68</sup> G.S. de Krey, *London and the restoration, 1659-83* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 192-201, 213, 219-20.
- <sup>69</sup> For further discussion, see sections 2.1.5; and 7.5.
- <sup>70</sup> See J.J. Baddeley, *The aldermen of Cripplegate ward* (1900), p. 88; LMA COL/CN/01/01/006 fo 177.
- <sup>71</sup> Dates of elections for the vacant office of chamberlain have been verified from B. Masters, *The chamberlain of the City of London, 1237-1987* (1988), pp. 112-13. A search of the London daily press has in each case given the total of votes cast for each candidate.
- <sup>72</sup> W.P. Treloar, *Wilkes and the City* (1917), pp. 196-9.
- <sup>73</sup> Clark, *English society, 1688-1832*, p. 17.
- <sup>74</sup> C. Harvey, E.M. Green and P.J. Corfield, ‘Record linkage theory and practice: an experiment in the application of multiple pass record linkage algorithms’, *History and Computing*, 8 (1996), pp. 78-89.
- <sup>75</sup> From 1696 until 1716 parliaments were limited in duration to three years by 6 & 7 William & Mary, c. 2 (1694). By 1 George I, c. 38 (1716) they were limited in duration to seven years, reduced to five years by the Parliament Act of 1910.
- <sup>76</sup> This franchise is explained in further detail in section 3.

- <sup>77</sup> See J.A. Phillips and C. Wetherell, 'The Great Reform Bill of 1832 and the rise of partisanship', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), pp. 621-46; idem, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the political modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), pp. 411-36, and P. Salmon, *Electoral reform at work: local politics and national parties, 1832-41* (Woodbridge, 2002).
- <sup>78</sup> For the not infrequent election affrays in the metropolis, when lively crowd participation verged upon more riotous behaviour, see evidence in section 3.6.
- <sup>79</sup> The metropolitan figures are taken from the LED. The denominator is taken from P. Jupp, *The governing of Britain, 1688-1848* (Abingdon, 2006), p. 236.
- <sup>80</sup> Figures calculated from votes recorded in English constituencies in *Hist. Parl., 1754-90*.
- <sup>81</sup> E.A. Wrigley, 'A simple model of London's importance in changing English society and economy', *Past and Present*, 37 (1967), pp. 44-70.
- <sup>82</sup> Beales, 'Electorate before and after 1832', p. 148. The numbers polling in metropolitan constituencies are estimated from Stooks Smith and Craig.
- <sup>83</sup> All numbers reported in this paragraph are of voting acts, and take no account of the possibility of an individual having polled in more than one constituency.
- <sup>84</sup> M. Taylor, 'Interests, parties and the state: the urban electorate in England, c. 1820-72', in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds), *Party, state and society: electoral behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 54.
- <sup>85</sup> For Southwark summary tables, see Metropolitan Polls 8.1.4.
- <sup>86</sup> For the working of the pre-reform electoral system in general, see O'Gorman, *Voters, patrons, and parties*. But, like Namier's *Structure of politics*, O'Gorman's *Voters, patrons, and parties* is less strong on the metropolitan experience of popular politics than it is upon the rest of the country.
- <sup>87</sup> The interests of MPs were lovingly chronicled by L.B. Namier and his followers such as Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734-1832*. See also M. Taylor, 'Empire and parliamentary reform: the 1832 Reform Act revisited', in J. Innes and A. Burns (eds), *Rethinking the age of reform: Britain, 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 295-311.