

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

7.3 VOTER CLASSIFICATION BY FRANCHISE AND POST-1832 ELECTORAL REGISTRATON

Before the Reform Act of 1832, the county electorates comprised the standard 40-shilling freeholders, while every urban electorate had its own complexities and indeed vagaries. The details for Middlesex, London and Westminster have been thoroughly discussed in section 3. Since each pre-1832 electorate in each LED constituency was distinct from the other, no special classification was required.

Post-1832, however, a systematic distinction can be made in London and Westminster. That is because the Reform Act did not just introduce a new class of £10 householder electors in all borough constituencies. It also preserved the right of voting of existing borough electors, subject to a requirement of residence. The decision was one of political pragmatism, designed to avert the objections of qualified electors under the old franchise who might not qualify under the £10 rule.

Westminster's scot and lot electors had to continue to live within the constituency to preserve their right of voting, while London's surviving liverymen had to live within seven miles of the Guildhall. Liverymen and new voters are distinguished in both the London poll book of 1837 and the marked electoral register for London of 1847.

Unfortunately, the printed Westminster poll books of 1837 and 1841 do not distinguish between scot and lot voters and £10 householders, although the distinction is present in surviving electoral registers including the marked register of 1852 used in the LED.

Both liverymen and scot and lot electors obviously constituted a diminishing proportion of the total electorates, subject to the dual attrition of mobility and mortality. The London electoral register of 1832 recorded a peak of 9,527 liverymen qualified to vote. Meanwhile the earliest surviving electoral register for Westminster, that of 1835,

recorded some 7,365 scot and lot electors retaining their franchises. Subject to the caveat of double registration of those who were qualified under both the old and the new franchises, this distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ voters thus constitutes an elementary classification that is inherent in the data.

Those who newly gained the right of voting in 1832 had their qualification to vote entered in the electoral register. While this may appear to be a useful classification, in practice its value appears to be limited, as the overwhelming majority of new voters were qualified by occupation of a house. Similar considerations apply to the ‘nature of freehold’ information in the Middlesex county poll books. The voting behaviour of, say, beneficed clergymen may well have been distinctive. But the overwhelming majority of Middlesex freeholders were qualified to vote by ownership of a house.

Overall, the number of electors qualified under the old and new franchises in post-reform London and Westminster is shown in Table 80. The dual qualification survived for a generation, until the voters under the old system had moved away or died. Such a compromise indicated constitutional respect for the pre-reform electorate in these large constituencies – as well as a pragmatic political compromise.

Table 80
The electorate by franchise in the LED

Constituency	Year	Poll ID	Livery- men	Scot and Lot	Others	Total
London	1837	46	5,754		5,810	11,564
London	1847	48	7,486		13,783	21,269
Westminster	1852	67		1,497	13,386	14,883

Note: Figures in **bold** include unpolled electors.

Source: LED.