

LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

6.1 STUDYING ELECTIONS – INTRODUCTION TO DETAILED ELECTION HISTORIES

Sections 5 and 6 provide detailed histories of all the elections recorded in the LED. The notes give pointers to the voluminous primary sources which bear upon these events. The secondary literature in the form of historical studies is much less extensive, partly because political and constitutional history has been relatively out of research fashion in recent decades,¹ and also because the scope of the task for the entire metropolis is somewhat daunting. But the notes again seek to highlight the most important studies which are available.

Undoubtedly, the best starting-point is the incomparable *History of Parliament*.² That great work, which has been produced by the labours of generations of scholars, provides detailed information about constituencies, elections and MPs. In other words, it is a guide to the relatively narrow world of the ‘political nation’, comprising successful candidates in parliamentary elections. Another key resource is the biographical data provided about many leading figures in the *ODNB*.³

Unsuccessful candidates, meanwhile, tend to be more difficult to trace. But some, who were defeated in one election, succeeded at another time, as indicated in the notes; and a miscellany of other sources provide some contextual details about most of these active participants in the constitutional process.⁴ Their contributions may have been as brief as one election campaign. But their roles were not negligible. Metropolitan politics in this period were far from hermetically sealed. Unsuccessful candidates who contributed to election contests helped to make the system alert to wider issues and interests. They sought both to clarify and to voice the views of the electors.

Hence the creation of a database of contested parliamentary elections with individual details of candidates together with information about the

different constituencies across the country in which they stood, as done in the LED **Candidates** table (see Table 24), would be a useful addition to historians' knowledge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century politics as a whole.

Notes

- ¹ P.J. Corfield, 'British history: the exploding galaxy', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34 (2011), pp. 517-26, in issue devoted to 'The state of the discipline', ed. M.O. Grenby; also available on-line.
- ² See *Hist. Parl., 1690-1715*; *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*; *Hist. Parl., 1754-90*; *Hist. Parl., 1790-1820*; and *Hist. Parl., 1820-32*. For available volumes on-line, see also www.historyofparliamentonline.org.
- ³ Available on-line at www.oxforddnb.com.
- ⁴ See variously *BDMBR*; Beaven; Craig; G.P. Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734-1832* (New Haven, Ct, 1955; repr. Hamden, Ct, 1972); *ODNB*; Stenton; Stooks Smith; B.M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978); and *BPP* (1878) LXII.