

Electoral Registers in Reading Central Library

Electoral Registers are lists of people entitled to vote in local and parliamentary elections. Originally there were different lists for different types of election.

- ⌚ **Electoral Registers** as we now know them start in 1832, as a result of the Great Reform Act. They list those who can vote in parliamentary elections.
- ⌚ **Burgess Lists** record those who can vote in local elections. Reading became a municipal borough, with elected members, in 1835. There were typically more people eligible to vote in a local election than in a national election.

In pre reform days, records were taken of the Poll, and these were published either in book form or as broadsheets. Between them, Poll Records, Burgess Lists and Electoral Registers are invaluable records of people.

Arrangement

Nowadays Electoral Registers are usually arranged in address order, although Reading Registers and Burgess Lists up to 1914 are in alphabetical order of surname, as are some small hamlets even now in modern registers.

Reading was divided into 10 Wards in 1887, and in 1911 the number increased to 13 with the incorporation of Caversham and Tilehurst. Until very recently there were 15 Wards, but in 2004 the number increased to 16 with the creation of Mapledurham Ward.

Every Borough or District is now split into Electoral Wards, and each Ward is divided into Parliamentary Polling Districts. The modern electoral register is arranged alphabetically by the two-letter code for each Parliamentary Polling District and then alphabetically by street within each polling district.

In a post war register, to find which polling district a street is in, use the street index at the front of the register. There is a separate street index for Reading which is useful for registers from the 1950s.

The Reading Electoral Register first recorded postcodes in 1995.

Who appears in an Electoral Register?

Electoral Registers only list people who are entitled or registered to vote. The laws governing entitlement to vote have changed over time, and only since 1928 have all men and women of full age been able to vote. Even on modern electoral registers, people who have not registered to vote will not appear on the register. In the most recent registers people can opt out of being listed in the publicly accessible copy - the edited Reading Borough register contains only 85% of those registered.

Before 1918, the right to vote was tied to property ownership. In 1918 all men aged 21 or over normally resident in the constituency could vote; and all women aged 30 or over who could already vote locally, or were the wives of local government voters, were given the right to vote in national elections for the first time. All women aged 21 or over were finally given the vote in 1928. The qualification age for men and women was lowered to 18 in 1969.

It is possible to trace an individual using the Electoral Register?

It is very difficult to do so in the printed register unless you already have some idea where the person lives, because of the way the register is arranged.

There are various Internet sites with a copy of the edited UK Electoral Register, which can be searched by name but there is often a charge for the service. Try <http://www.192.com/>, who also offer their service over the phone at 118 119. Another site is <http://www.b4usearch.co.uk/>. Both expect you to sign up with them before they will release Electoral Register information.

What if a name does not appear in the Edited Register?

About 15% of Reading voters opted not to have their name included on the edited list. They are indicated by an interruption in the running total of electors in the particular polling district. The names should appear on the Full Register, which is available in Electoral Services office in the Civic Offices.

People may also not appear because they:

- a) forgot to complete the forms in time or illegally decided not to register;
- b) may have moved to their current address recently;
- c) belong to certain groups who are disqualified from voting.

What is the Edited Register?

There is now a two-tier system of Electoral Registers. The Full Electoral Register is a list of everybody who is registered to vote on the qualifying date: a specified day, usually October 15th of the previous year. It is now possible to choose not to appear in copies of the Edited Register, which will be kept separate from the Full Register, itself available only at Electoral Services in the appropriate Council Offices.

Which Electoral Registers are held in Reading Central Library?

All our Electoral Registers are in the Local Studies Collection, on the top floor. We hold the current edited Register for Reading, and earlier Registers, Burgess Lists and Poll Records back to 1740. We also have some early Berkshire County Registers and Poll Records. For areas elsewhere in Berkshire we hold post war Registers. We also have some Registers for Oxfordshire.

Reading

Poll Records	1740, 1754, 1768, 1774, 1780, 1790, 1802, 1818, 1820, 1826, 1835, 1837, 1841, 1847, 1852, 1865
Burgess Lists	1837-1842, 1844, 1845, 1848, 1850-1866, 1876, 1877 (Abbey Ward only), 1878, 1882-1914
Electoral Registers	1832, 1837, 1840, 1843-1850, 1852, 1854, 1856, 1859, 1860, 1891, 1910, 1911, 1918, 1919 (Spring & Autumn), 1920, 1921, 1925 (less Abbey Ward), 1926-1939, 1945, 1947-date

Berkshire

Poll Records	1768, 1812, 1818, 1832
Electoral Registers	1832, 1839-40, 1845-46, 1850-51, 1860-61

Borough Poll Records

Wallingford	1847
Windsor	1794, 1802, 1804

District registers

(Pre-war Registers are held in Berkshire Record Office, Tel: 0118 901 5132)

Abingdon	1949-1974
Bracknell	1977- 1979, 1981-2001, 2003 (Bracknell was included in Wokingham up to 1976)
Newbury	1946 (Town only), 1949-52, 1954-2002
Windsor	1949, 1951, 1954-1974
Wokingham	1949, 1951-1952, 1954-1965, 1967-2002

Oxfordshire registers

County	1844-45, 1850-51
South Oxfordshire	1965-1966, 1968-1969, 1970-1974, 1976, 1979-1987, 1988-1998

The Berkshire Record Office also holds a large sets of registers please contact them for details, as do Libraries in other Berkshire Unitary Authorities.

What about other areas of the country?

Electoral Registers for the whole of the United Kingdom can be consulted at the British Library. Tel 020 7412 7536 or check out the website www.bl.uk/collections/social/spis_er.html

Libraries and Electoral Registry Offices across the country hold their own local Electoral Registers, we can give you the contact details. They are unlikely to do searches for you.

Recommended Reading

Gibson, Jeremy, & Rogers, Colin. *Electoral Registers since 1832; and Burgess Rolls*. Federation of Family History Societies, 2nd edition, 1990 (929.3)
See in particular the introductory chapter detailing changes in the franchise.

Gibson, Jeremy, & Rogers, Colin. *Poll Books c1696-1872; a directory to holdings in Great Britain*. Federation of Family History Societies, 3rd edition, 1994 (929.3)
The introductory chapter discusses elections before the days of secret ballots.

Cheffins, Richard H.A. *Parliamentary constituencies and their registers since 1832 : a list of constituencies from the Great Reform Act with the British Library's holdings of electoral registers, together with the library's holdings of burgess rolls, poll books and other registers* British Library, London, 1998 (929.3)