



SUSSEX FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

POLL BOOKS, ELECTORAL REGISTERS and 1939 REGISTER

POLL BOOKS

Early Poll Books date from circa 1696 and record the names of those who were eligible to vote and the candidate that they voted for in county elections and many of these have survived. Unfortunately, similar records for borough elections were destroyed in 1907.

Those who were entitled to vote were male, over the age of 21 years who held freehold lands or tenements whose net value exceeded a particular sum and met residence qualifications. These qualifications changed from time-to-time.

ELECTORAL REGISTERS

These began in 1832 at a time when a property qualification was still required to vote and the registers showed the address of that property. From 1867 the franchise was extended to all male owners of property worth £5 per annum and tenants paying £12 per annum. It was not until 1872 that secret ballots were introduced. In 1884 all male householders were included plus tenants paying £10 per annum. Universal male franchise was introduced in 1918 and some women over 30 were also given the vote. Universal franchise for women over 21 began in 1928; and this franchise was extended to all those over 18 years of age in 1969.

SEARCHING POLL BOOKS & ELECTORAL REGISTERS

A collection of records will be found in most county record offices, but other repositories include the British Library, Bodleian Library in Oxford, Cambridge University Library, Guildhall Library in London and the Society of Genealogists. See *Poll Books c1696 - 1872 A Directory of Holdings in Great Britain* by Jeremy Gibson & Colin Rogers, published in 1990 by the Federation of Family History Societies ISBN 1872094112, for full details of what is available. A useful guide can also be found online at <http://www.electoralregisters.org.uk>.

Some information is now becoming available online and it is being regularly extended. These collections include:

Ancestry.co.uk	London Electoral Registers	1832 to 1965
	Various Poll Books & Electoral Registers	pre-1986
Findmypast.com	England Poll Books	1830 to 1837
	Electoral Registers in the British Library Collection	1832 to 1932
	Absent Voters Lists	1918 to 1921
TheGenealogist	A variety of older records	Mostly 18 th & 19 th Centuries

BE WARNED that not all the above collections are complete and so if you do not find the item that you are seeking, be sure to read the detailed content of each collection on each web site.

1939 National Register

This is available on Findmypast.co.uk and Ancestry.co.uk (transcriptions can be seen on <https://www.myheritage.com/> but the images cannot be seen). This enumeration of civilians (service personnel were not included) was taken on 29 September 1939 and was the basis for Identity Cards, Ration Books and conscription. It includes names, dates of birth, occupations, marital status of 41 million individuals. This is part of the regular subscription and available at record offices and libraries with a licence.

It differs from a census in that it was not just a snapshot of the nation on one day. The register continued to some extent to be revised in subsequent years to bring it up to date. And this seems to have continued until 1991 though how comprehensive the revisions were I do not know. So the surnames of women who married or remarried after the register was compiled often seem to have been amended in the register.

The records remained with the NHS up until 1991 – therefore some changes of names between 1939 and 1991 are listed in the records. All of these names should appear in the indexes so, in these instances, you can search for an individual using either their former or subsequent name. However, in some instances one of the names may have been omitted or removed.

Free searches can be made (and are potentially very useful) on Findmypast but to see the full transcript and images you will need a subscription, or use at a record office or library.

Remember, as with all transcriptions, that there may be errors in the indexing. Corrections may be sent but take some time for the index to be changed.

There is also some evidence that some original contributors were not telling the truth.

Use imaginative searching. Perhaps enter a surname and a place name.

You can then see the Preview which will show you the names and birth year of any other now deceased (if known) adults of the same surname and the number of other people you would be able to view on paying for the record plus the number of other people whose records are officially closed.

You can also search for a particular address. Go to

<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/1939-register> and click on the “Address” tab that appears just above the name search boxes. The address search boxes will then appear for you to complete. There are a huge number of mistranscribed street names, so one search may not be sufficient. If you are in real difficulty, you can enter the name of a borough or district and then click the search box and a list of all the street names in that district will appear and you can see all the transcribed street names and work through them one by one.

It is also possible to use the 1939 Electoral Register on Ancestry to find the London address where your search subject was living just before the declaration of war and then use that address to search the 1939 Register.

This extra tip comes from a SFHG member:

“ Searching the index of the 1939 census on Findmypast is free, and once you have found someone, you have the basic information about them – location (e.g. Horsham RD = Rural District) year of birth, and, unless the person is living alone, the name of one other person at the address. This will often turn out to be the spouse. If you select Advanced Search and specify the exact year of birth as given, you can then establish the month of birth by refining the search by working through the months. If you have a baptism date, you can work backwards by putting in the baptism month (leaving the date blank) until your person comes back in the results. Similarly, you can use the last month of the registration quarter and work back. Having got the correct month and year, you can then (painfully slowly I admit!) start at one end of the month and work through one day at a time until you finally get the person to appear in the results again. Hard work, but at least its free! A word of caution – not surprisingly some people quote their year of birth incorrectly, so you may end up with a claimed year of birth that’s wrong (I found one that was 2 years after the person was baptised) but someone’s birthday is far more likely to be remembered correctly.”

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