

An Introduction to our Absent Voters indexes

The Representation of the People Act of February 1918 extended the right to vote in Parliament to all men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30, dramatically altering the face of British democracy. This act of Parliament also allowed service men as young as 19 to register so that they could vote in their home constituency whilst they were away from home. These lists were known as the Absent Voter lists and they also included eligible women who were serving the war effort away from home. A deadline of 18 August 1918 for registration was set and a list compiled from applications up to this date was published on 15 October 1918 in time for the General election in December.

A second opportunity to register was offered after the election and a deadline was set of 18 February 1919. The list resulting from applications received during this second wave was published in April 1919. The absent voters lists were prepared by the local Electoral Registrar and were published twice a year in spring and autumn alongside the general electoral registers. Many service men did not return home immediately after the end of the war and so they can be located in later years on these lists. They were often published as separate volumes to the main electoral registers.

These lists provide a useful resource for those researching soldiers who fought in the First World War in the absence of many service records which have not survived. It is worth mentioning however that they often relied on the application forms to be completed by the families of service personnel at home and therefore not all soldiers are listed and the details of their service numbers and regiments may not always be accurate. Despite this the lists provide a valuable starting point for researchers.

1) This Index covers the Absent Voter lists for City of Worcester in autumn 1918, and is the result of a project to update an earlier index with additional details from the register such as the home address of the individual so that the online indexes include all the same details as the original lists. Each index now gives the parish, name, home address, service number and service unit of the service personnel, if listed, as well as an indication of where the entry is in the volume i.e. page number and line.

2) This Index covers the Absent Voter lists for Kidderminster (with Bromsgrove), Stourbridge, Bewdley, and Evesham from 1919 and is the result of a project to update earlier indexes with additional details from the register such as the home address so that the online indexes include all the same details as the original lists. There are two versions, one listed alphabetically by surname and one by polling division. Each index now gives the parish, name, home address, service number and service unit of the service personnel, if listed, as well as an indication of where the entry is in the volume i.e. page number and line.